











# THE POET & THE SEER

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*papyrus* 2 GANENDRA MITRA LANE  
CALCUTTA 700 004 \* INDIA

**Published : January 1955**

**Proofs Corrected by Provas Saha & Subimal Lahiri**

**Published by Arijit Kumar for Papyrus, 2 Ganendra Mitra Lane,  
Calcutta 700 004. Printed by Nishikanta Hatai from Tusar  
Printing Works, 26, Bidhan Sarani, Calcutta 6. Bound by  
Ajit & Company, 127 Baithakkhana Road, Calcutta 700009.**

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## TRADITION & MODERN POETIC THOUGHT

MANY intelligent men, who thought they were well equipped for literary appreciation, have been known to have turned away from modern English poetry in sheer disgust. Some of them discover in it pure exhibitionism – a sacrifice of poetry and even sense for the mere pleasure of flaunting one's supposed originality. And even those who are more sympathetic and would not go so far, who would rather concede that the newness of this poetry is not merely a stunt, but a reality, find themselves unable to view all this newness with complacency and unmixed approval. Esoteric and forbidding, they would say it is, in spite of all this newness, or rather because of it. If ever in history there was a violent attempt to break away completely from past tradition and cast all common standards of enjoyment and understanding to the winds, it is now to be seen in the work of these poets. It is this ruthless alienation from accepted values and standards, they would deplore, that has considerably weakened this poetry and diminished its chances of success.

Desperately untraditional as this poetry may look, the critical theories that support it and explain its genesis would startle one out of any self-complacent mood of judgment, by their unexpected emphasis on tradition. It is to relate poetry to life, we are told, that all this newness – in matter and manner and technique –, has been requisitioned. If there has been a break, it is with a decadent tradition. The aim is to re-discover the real tradition, the main stream of the living tradition, with which life and poetry must be brought into immediate contact or face inanition and death.

Modern poetry may not yet have gained, at least in some quarters the prestige and importance that it claims. It, may

be, most probably, is dismissed by men of culture as something that does not matter. But it would not be so easy to dismiss modern criticism with a smile of superiority. It has already become a vital force. Even so far away, in Bengal, its repercussions are clearly perceptible. And it is as it should be. It concerns us, it concerns all men living in these times. Because this criticism is not merely the manifesto of a particular school of poets, nor is it the credo of a particular movement. It is an attempt to see the entire bulk of literature the world has produced as a whole and to see it together with the life that each variety of literature represents. It is an attempt to discover the relation between a particular form of life and the literature it has produced, between one pattern of life that has disentangled itself from the general sweep and another, between one kind of literary activity and another.

Since the beginning of this century, or indeed the symptoms of the malady may be traced back to a much earlier period, a general complaint has been heard all over Europe that life is growing unreal. Up to the last great war, the vague grievance was allowed to rankle and ferment with no remedy suggested, no definite line of attack being undertaken. But with the bitter taste of the reality of the war in their mouth, the poets began to see and suggest, to undertake literary expeditions. Life, as they lived it, was indeed unreal. But it was not because of the all-enveloping miasma of the Romantic tradition which, they supposed, had screened from view the throbbing reality. The screen was pulled down, and there was the reality of the war, the reality of the anguish-riven soul extinguishing itself in dead callousness. This was not the reality they were looking for. So it was now a question of choice, as indeed it always had been ; now only more emphatically so. For was not the former eagerness for reality 'red in tooth and claw', a matter of choice, an avidity for facts and figures, for something raw and racy, for physical experiences on the animal plane and mental experiences on the political

plane ? Now it was realised that a capricious choice would always lead to a fractional reality ; that in mapping out life as it is today an intelligent choice of viewpoints and an objective scale of measurement have to be used ; and that this scale of measurement must be proved by time and standardised by experience, that is to say, it must derive its authenticity from tradition.

The reality then is neither in the life as it is lived ; nor merely in the rude exposure of whatever is hidden behind current cant and cliché, existing sentiments and beliefs, policies and procedures. The discovery of its outline calls for a strenuous exercise of a broadened, educated imagination. And the only manner in which the imagination can be educated, is to bring it into intimate contact with all the great traditions of the world.

The magnitude of importance attached to tradition will be apparent from the following passage from the essay, *Tradition and Individual Talent* by T. S. Eliot :

"We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors ; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity."

## 2

But what is tradition ?

The tradition referred to in the passage quoted is obviously a literary tradition. And a mere enumeration of all the great traditions that are usually talked about would at once enable one to see that they are not all of the same nature ;

they can be classified. Some are religious, some literary, some socio-political and some even philosophical.

In this connection, it should be helpful to undertake an examination of the position of T. S. Eliot, whose critical intelligence is supposed by many to be of the same stature as Matthew Arnold's, and who is considered to be the first critic of integrity after him. The following facts about Eliot's literary career should give additional significance and importance to this enquiry. It was Eliot who first rescued modern poetry from its nebulous stage and gave it a definite shape. It was his poetry and critical theory that served as beacon lights to the younger generation of poets. But it is his emphasis on tradition that is evoking violent protests even from his followers and pushing him almost into a minority of one.

Stephen Spender, for instance, a modern poet-critic, tries in his book, *Destructive Element*, to show up the anomaly of Eliot's position. He quotes the distinguished critic I. A. Richards to support his view that the true Eliot is the Eliot of 'The Waste Land', 'The Hollow Men' — where he appears as a poet who has taken his plunge in the destructive element. Immersion in this destructive element is, according to Spender, the only reliable test of modern literature and his thesis is to prove the descent of this trait from Henry James in a line of literary succession to the present day. So one sees how he discovers in Eliot's traditionalism only an 'elaborate way of bolstering up personal dislikes and prejudices' and also of camouflaging the traces of his latter-day poetic retreat into the shelter of Anglicanism.

But he rightly points out that Eliot's use of the word is vague and ambiguous, even dangerous, although he himself does not offer an elucidation. Although he wilfully misunderstands Eliot's distinction between the classic poet who depends on tradition and the mere poet of genius who does not, and makes the latter responsible for an opinion which he does not hold, an opinion that tradition must be the *sine qua non* of all poetry,

yet he raises a pertinent point when he points out, that, if the quality of a poetry at all depends on the tradition on which it is based, then the comparative merit of poets would depend on their higher or lower degree of traditionalism, which is absurd and meaningless. Meaningless, because, in his opinion, it is a criterion that cannot be applied ; the degree of one's traditionalism can never be assessed. This point indeed may be disputed. But one feels that unless the word tradition is made much clearer, a statement like the following, quoted from Eliot, is bound to be assailed with a series of questions :

"The mark of a mature poet is that he", says Eliot, "not merely restores a tradition which has been in abeyance, but in his poetry re-twines as many straying strands of tradition as possible." One would ask what kind of traditions are these ? Would any of the different classes of tradition mentioned earlier serve the purpose of a mature poet ? If of two poets of equal merit, one chooses a comparatively minor tradition, what would be the result ? Is it possible for a poet of genius, or for that matter for any person of average sensitiveness, to live without a degree of awareness of at least some of the traditions current among his people ? Then why the distinction between a poet with tradition and a poet without any ? And lastly, what would be the proof and measurement of a poet's traditionalism ? — his popularity ?

Eliot, realising his weak position, offered this clarification in *After Strange Gods* : "What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood-kinship of the same people living in the same place.... The population should be homogeneous ; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to become fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate."

One sees in this not only an awareness of the multiplicity of traditions that can be classified in the manner indicated be-

fore, but also a nebulous but strong apprehension of the existence of a more permanent and comprehensive variety of tradition which he can neither isolate nor name. Hence, inspite of this statement, the questions asked remain unanswered.

Finally, Eliot has to take shelter under other expressions, like 'historic sense', 'sense of the time'. A long passage is worth quoting in this connection. 'Tradition' still puts in a bashful appearance, ready to go, but hardly knowing how to make an honourable exit.

'Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand ; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year ; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence ; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely ~~with~~ his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.'

## 3

Gilbert Murray shows a clearer perception of that variety of tradition which Eliot fails to isolate. In *Religio Grammatici*, he tries to prove that 'The civilisation of the Western world is a unity of descent and brotherhood,' meaning that all the great traditions of Europe, however remote from one another in point of time or distance, are inter-connected. And yet he has to admit the existence in England of a kind of tradition persisting from times immemorial, independent of and unaffected by anything. 'Let us admit freely', he says, 'that there must of necessity be in all English literature a strain of what one may call vernacular English thought, and that some currents of it, currents of great beauty and freshness, would hardly have been different if all Romance literature had been a sealed book to our tradition.'

And if one but extends the range of vision beyond the limits of a particular country, one would have to admit freely in a similar manner that certain patterns of thought and feeling are recognisable behind all human civilisations, cultures and cults ; patterns that are permanent and universal ; patterns that appear to be related among themselves in some manner, that suggest by their connectedness a continuity, a tradition of the human race as a whole.

Now, in order to get the whole position clear, let us start from another angle of vision. What, then, are the essential characteristics of a tradition ? How does a tradition originate ? How far and in what manner should poetry utilise tradition and which type or types of tradition should it value more than the others.

Seeing that even a legislature, an educational institution or a business organisation claims to have some traditions of its own, it is necessary to restrict the use of the term if it is to serve any useful purpose in critical writing. To use 'traditional' as a term of opprobrium in describing a poet who merely imitates his immediate literary ancestors should be discoura-



ged. It should not be used merely to imply the continued existence of any mood or manner. Whatever may be the limitations of place and time, a tradition must represent the whole life of a group of people, an entire outlook upon life and not merely an agglomeration of fashions and prejudices, beliefs and sentiments, or even of thought-systems and sets of principles unless they have been lived and assimilated into a general attitude.

The essential characteristics of a tradition would therefore include, first of course its continuity and then its range of significance, its reference not to any isolated types of reactions – intellectual, moral, cultural, religious, political etc. – but to those common reaction patterns in every plane of the lives of the people concerned, that indicate a general plan, a common inspiration, – that is recognised to have been responsible for the formation of the group and also its cohesiveness.

On accepting this view of the essential nature of traditions, the possibility of classifying them still remains. Because it will be seen that any tradition – cultural, moral or religious – to be worth its name and recognised as a major tradition – must go beyond the culture, the ethics, the creed or the philosophy and embrace the entire life with which it is connected. Vaishnavism in India, for instance, may have owed its origin to a religious inspiration and we may agree to call it a tradition – mainly religious. But we see the central core of religious impulse spreads itself out in all directions giving a uniqueness to the Vaishnavas in their very approach to life, a uniqueness that sought expression not only in religious practice, but in literature and culture. The surest test of a living tradition is that it overflows the banks of its original bed and inundates the whole extent of the life in which it is born.

A religious faith, an ethical principle, a particular principle of conduct, an intellectual system – any one of these may start a tradition ; but none of these can become one unless it has been lived, unless it has struck its roots in the head and heart,

in the imagination and instinct of a group of men. And this exactly is what makes it so important to poets, who are dealers in life, if that phrase can be excused. In traditions, they find life revealed, crystallised ; outside traditions they meet with life in the amorphous state. From his own personal experience, a mature poet learns how to value beliefs more than notions, understanding more than fancy, belief of many more than belief of one, faith of long duration more than a belief of a shorter duration. If one remembers that this is not an advocacy of conservatism or a denial of original poetic vision, but only the analysis of a poet's source of strength — an elucidation of the circumstances that are favourable to the growth of a poetic talent, one would perhaps be ready to agree with Eliot that genius in order that it may fully realise itself, needs something more than its intrinsic strength — the happy circumstance of a congenial tradition ready at hand.

## 4

Now, I think, it would be easier to understand how historical sense, awareness of the times and tradition are inter-related.

Awareness of the times, which has been the common cry of all poets who have called themselves modern since before the last world war, has been with some at least, merely a notion that the world is disintegrating, that there is nothing to live for, and nothing for it but to take a plunge in the destructive element. We admit that an acute sense of dire events, of the desperateness of man's present predicament, should feature very largely in any appraisal of our times. But taken by itself, does not this concentrated, unrelieved bitterness, this deliberate wallowing in misery, show rather a personal bias and a lack of the historical sense which Eliot believes to be indispensable for understanding one's place in time ? If a man's house is on fire, it may be quite natural for him to behave like a raving maniac. But his mental reactions at that

moment are more or less on a behaviouristic, stimulus-response plane and can hardly be called an awareness of his position, which would indeed come much later. The difference between the emotion of a wounded animal and a feeling of tragedy, in the Aristotelian sense, has not been very clear to this section of poets.

There are some, of course, who have had more success and influence, who are not without this historical sense. If we go back for a moment to the passage from Eliot quoted last, we shall see that this historical sense for him is no other than what we have described as the large tradition of the human race.

Some again mean by this awareness of the times, only an intimate knowledge of the various problems of modern life – political, economic, social, moral ; – a cognizance of different points of view, of conflicting motives and interest, of strings and pulleys behind the puppet show of visible incident. This indeed presupposes a knowledge of the historical development of notions and institutions, but not necessarily a historical sense, which is more than knowledge, an intuitive perception.

Some believe that an awareness of the times is practically helpful to an artist in his artistic practice. This means an awareness of the way in which the minds of one's contemporaries work, so that this awareness amounts to something like an actor's or a speaker's sense of audience. It cannot be denied that an awareness in this sense is an equipment that enables an artist to adjust his technique of expression in such a manner that he may reach a wide public. But even this type of awareness cannot be effective for any length of time unless it is supported by historical sense. A speaker arriving at a late hour to speak before a gathering, is bound to be puzzled, unless, of course, he proposes to deliver a set speech. He may have a sense of audience in the sense that he has a general acquaintance with the ways in which the mind of the people works. But not having a knowledge of the past pro-

ceedings of the meeting and the sequence of the people's mental reactions, he cannot be expected to know their exact mental attitude at the moment when he rises to speak. This, certainly, would place him under a great disadvantage.

Vernacular tradition or home-tradition is closely allied with this historical sense, this grasp of the vast background of the life of Man, the only difference being that the former is restricted within the limits of one place. A man born with a poet's sensibility, cannot fail, in the process of his living among men, to imbibe both kinds of tradition in a higher or lower degree. Historical sense must indeed depend on a mental power, a stronger power of mental vision than ordinary, a sufficient proportion of which must come to a poet as an inborn endowment. It can be educated and refined by labour but cannot be 'obtained by great labour', as Eliot loosely remarks, thereby getting himself entangled in hopeless self-contradiction. If we agree about the meaning of historical sense as described, we must admit that all true poets must have it in a sufficient proportion as endowment. If we now accept Eliot's statement that 'This historical sense is what makes a poet traditional', the logical conclusion would be, that, in that case, all true poets, are traditional. How can then Blake cease to be traditional after his 25th year and Shelley retain the distinction of being a poet of genius but fail to be traditional and hence a classic like Dante ?

The matter is that Eliot is here referring to another kind of tradition, the only kind, indeed, to which the use of the word tradition should be restricted, if it is to be rescued from its hopeless ambiguity. It is that kind of tradition, already described, which may originate from a particular thought-sequence or an emotional attitude, but which finally involves the whole of the life that comes under its influence and fixes in it definite patterns of response, and heaves it up, as it were, into a peak of self-expression. A poet who is born at the opportune moment of the upward surge of a tradition feels the

upthrust, a strength more than his own. A poet who finds himself between two waves appears to be beating ineffectual wings in the void in vain. A poet who is born in steadier times, when neither an upheaval nor a decadence is apparent, looks for strength and support in a long-past tradition, or even in several in which he recognises some affinity with his own experience. If he can find no tradition that suits him, he can still write good poetry, but a poetry of only restricted appeal and significance.

One aspect of the mystery of the making of poetry seems then, to be this. An effective degree of historical sense and awareness of the times must be there, in every case. But although these two things are interdependent, a particular poet or a particular generation of poets may have them in varying proportions. That is why at times historical sense tends to become lazily self-sufficient and hazy, and ceases to ratify and refine itself by a close contact with fact ; and again at times contemporaneity tends towards merely a smart unimaginative matter-of-factness, an over-emphasis of affairs and facts of the day, on the newspaper variety of reality. When, however, a poet combines both in a happy proportion, he begins to write significant poetry. But if he is to rise to the stature of greatness and universal significance, he must utilise the impulse of a tradition in its restricted sense. If it is the tradition of his own times, he will use it as a contrast to some defect or as an impetus to some potentiality in his own age. Mere reliving in a past tradition is certainly reactionary ; harmful and characteristic of a weak talent. Seizing the whole core of energy at the heart of the tradition that he chooses as his own, a great poet must act and fight in the living present ; bursting open all locked doors of mystery, subduing all obstinate anomalies and contradictions, lashing into wakefulness all doped confusion, he must create, or make for, a new mental order.

## TRUTH-SENSE & POETRY TODAY

SINCE the beginning of this century many have been the poetical creeds or aesthetic doctrines that have continued to influence or affect the creative efforts of European and American poets, e. g. aestheticism, realism, symbolism, surrealism, naturalism and so on. All these were formulated and given tangible shape in their works by French writers and poets in the latter half of the nineteenth century ; but in the early years of the twentieth century, England seemed to offer the most fertile ground for poetical experiments, which sought straightaway to apply principles and techniques derived from the theories or creeds named above, to fuse a number of them if necessary, or adapt the chosen one to the poetic need of the moment. The result was an insistence on each poet's individuality and uniqueness, an apparent growth of freedom and the promise of an endlessly varied poetical output. But the opening up of new springs of poetry or the discovery of new techniques of expression is not a task which any and every poet can accomplish. But even a moderately endowed poet can effect certain superficial changes in style or improvise minor novelties of technique. So, the innovations which came and held the field during the first decade were a certain freshness, if not occasionally a certain lightness of manner, vigour and verse in new verse rhythms ; new rhymes often startlingly unusual : free-verse ranging from lines of varying length capable of perfect scansion to an ordering of language movement hardly distinguishable from that of prose ; a new accent of intimacy, of democratic bon-homie or fellowship in the poet's voice ; or self-dramatisation by the poet through the assumption of an ironical or ridiculous role in his own poetry — a device initiated by the French poets Cerbiere and

La Forge, and so effectively used by T. S. Eliot in his 'Prufrock' poems, and more notably in 'Gerontion'. Examples of the last-named kind of innovation are to be found in Bengali poetry in poets like Jatindranath Sen Gupta and Premendra Mitra. In their case, the new manner had behind it a new feeling to justify it, but this cannot be said of some other poets in this country and elsewhere who seemed to have won attention for a while only by virtue of their manner.

Apart from these, there appeared an amazing variety of new subject matter. The new age with its machines and factories, its dynamos and aeroplanes and weapons of war and the new patterns of lives of navy, army, and industrial personnel made an ever increasing demand on the attention of the poet. And the two successive world wars finally opened a wide pathway for the entry of this world of 'reality' into poetry. Crude and violent scenes and situations, mercilessly laid bare, which would never have been accepted as themes for poetry by former poets, were now transformed by a sense of acute suffering, agony and anger into a kind of poetical material, pungent in taste and yet intense in appeal for the mind of the new reader.

Of course, these types of newness soon lost their appeal. But through all these experiments there has been a real ceaseless search for new values. A few fortunate poets have discovered certain new poetic principles and applied them in their works with undeniable success—and these indeed may be regarded as the specific contribution of the modern age to poetry. This contribution has its share of originality and uniqueness, though these are not wholly unconnected with previous modes and achievement in the field of poetry. Whatever is really original or new does indeed always establish itself by maintaining a link and a continuity with the past. This also has been the case with modern poetry.

The new contribution may be considered from two standpoints, under two heads ; but it springs from the same funda-

mental principle, namely the desire to awaken a sense of 'truth' at the heart of poetry and to explore and find living forms for it. Keats's poetical utterance regarding truth and beauty is well-known. When Gautier, the French poet, won recognition as the originator of the aesthetic school of poetry, the elder poet Victor Hugo eulogised him in a poem in which he said 'Va chercher levrai, toi qui susses trouver le beau' – 'Go to seek truth, you who know how to find beauty.' This quest, after having tried many bye-ways and alleys till the end of the nineteenth century, became resolute and unremitting at the beginning of the twentieth. It became increasingly clear that realism which has nothing more to sustain it than external facts and sensations could have its rightful place in thrillers, but had very little to do with poetry. Even such experiences as involved or represented naturalistic sense-realism, psychological analysis or an upsurge of the sub-conscious must bathe in and be transformed by an inner poetic consciousness before they could gain admission. This was one side of the problem. On the other side it was now evident to poets that the new age would not permit an act of obstinate introversion, of an immersion in the depths of the inner self by completely rejecting the outer world with its panorama of life, its succession of scenes and events created by man and nature. This age has come with an implacable demand for a universal acceptance of the hard realities of life, for an extension of consciousness. The poet must satisfy these requirements – not merely by introducing a number of new 'subjects' in his poetry, but by so expanding his individual 'awareness' as to include progressively the consciousness of social groups, of the nation, of mankind as a whole. Within his own self the poet must develop the 'truth-sense' like a light or a 'rasa' or supreme solvent or principle of assimilation, and as the appropriate field or vehicle of this inner power he must have extensive personal experience and awareness of the facts and events of the external world. These two things – an inner sense of truth and a corresponding extension



of the outer consciousness – can be seen in each of the more important poets of the twentieth century. This may be illustrated by showing how Yeats, Eliot and Rilke, the three major European poets who made their contribution during the first two or three decades of this century, solved their individual poetical problems.

#### YEATS AND HIS POETICAL SOLUTION

It can be seen from Yeats's own writings that his search for a poetical poise and technique takes two different, even contradictory, directions. Even in 1899 he was looking for some inner truth which could stem the onrush of gross materialism and open up an avenue of approach through pure feeling and imagination to the eternal. He wanted to discover the 'naked mind' of man, the 'essential form' hidden behind the phenomena of the world. He objected to the dictum 'criticism of life' as an enunciation of the function of poetry which was, he believed, to lead the poet through the inner world to the domain of perennial truth.

But in 1908, the Irish dramatist Synge demanded in poetry a place of honour, apart from high thought, imagination and feeling, for the 'strong things of life'; he strongly advocated the need for 'timber' which alone could make the poetical structure strong and enduring. There is no doubt that Yeats was deeply influenced by this view. The fast-changing environment created by the 'new age' gradually forced him to admit that the 'external real' would also have to be given a place. For the poet who had been the foremost protagonist of symbolism and Celtic lore and written *Shadowy Waters*, how unexpected was the following statement which he made in 1928 :

"We should ascend out of common life, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market place, of men, of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole."

This was the poetic mission of the later Yeats and in this, indeed, he may be said to have achieved considerable success. It entailed a transformation of his poetic personality, almost a new birth. There were two aspects of this enterprise :

(i) To accept the truth of the world in its own extensiveness and diversity at its proper value without suffering it to be broken, mutilated, warped or deformed in any way by any personal creed, dogma or proclivity. The romantic poets had the external world transformed at will, or at least covered in a mist. The effort of the philosophical poets including those now called 'metaphysical' was either to receive external facts and impressions through the discursive intelligence or reflective or contemplative reason—the inevitable result being an over-weighting of poetry with heavy matter and its consequent fall into a plane of crude realism, or yield to the lure of generalisation and refinement which led them into the cold aesthetically neutral world of an almost mathematical abstraction. It cannot be gainsaid that Yeats's endeavour has opened for modern poets a new path of adventure. It has enabled him to welcome and receive in his poetry living men and women, historical and social events, the scientific revolution and such other aspects and traits of contemporary life. The specific contribution of Yeats lies in taking these local, temporal, 'individual' elements of the everyday world in their original, unpurged shape and form, and raising them to the plane of poetry by investing them with 'typicality' and universality.

In Tagore's poetry, the 'universal man' and the story of his onward march receive extensive treatment, but contemporary personalities and events do not figure prominently there.

(ii) In order to facilitate the reception and assimilation of this external material Yeats has deliberately pressed into service a sort of wakeful and nimble, objective and yet impassioned thought. The Irish poet, A. E. noticed this trait and eulogised Yeats for it. "We must keep our thought athletic"—he said. Yeats, it has been noted by many, has

used many symbols to represent aspects of world truth ; but these symbols do not belong to a realm of mystery, they are simply convenient devices like the symbols of algebra to bring the diffuse and disparate elements of reality into focus. They are what Louis Macneice calls Yeats's 'symbolic algebra'. Yeats himself confesses that he continually heard for sometime in his heart a voice declaring 'hammer your thoughts into a unity' – in response to which he made this attempt to master the truth of the world through a kind of thought which arose directly out of contact with situations in the world outside like the Irish revolution and the world war ; and as it was free from artificiality and effort, it never could get detached and become an activity separated from the impulse of his total personality. This is why his poetry has remained a vehicle for the expression of his personality and has not dragged his poetry down to pedestrian levels. Hence in his poetry one finds linked up in inseparable combination sense-impressions, passionate feelings, images and along with these a spontaneous outflow of thought. The type of thought which goes to the making of science romance may be very attractive and all-absorbing. Similarly, speculative or reflective thinking about the destiny of man and the world may not be incompatible with objective facts and yet evoke excitement and passion worthy of poetical treatment. Yeats is perhaps foremost among those who have thus made history yield fruitful themes for poetry. The poetry of Ezra Pound, who may be said to be the pioneer in this field, is a vast medley of unassimilated materials and images, which in detached fragments are often exquisite. If he could duly cultivate and evolve, the necessary power of synthesis he would certainly have won recognition as a major poet, a title which he has missed. Yeats has referred to this power of thought in many of his poems. For instance, he prays in his poem *An Acre of Grass* : 'Grant me an old man's frenzy, Myself must I remake' in the manner of Michaelangelo "Until imagination, ear and eye, / Can be content

with argument and deal / In abstract things" – as he says in his poem *Tower*. And this power of thought will give him his place, he expects, in the eternal world of artistic truth – 'gather me into the artifice of eternity', to quote from his poem *Sailing to Byzantium*.

Apart from this technique of using thought stimulated by direct experience and quickened by passion or imagination, Yeats makes another contribution to technique by which he seeks to represent in poetry all the aspects of his personality simultaneously. This is to compose poetry like music, divide it into sections and make each of these represent a particular mood or standpoint or the specific reaction of one level of the personality and weave all these into an integrated whole – a varied and yet harmonised pattern of total reaction. Such poems as *Tower*, *Meditations in Time of Civil War*, *Vacillation*, etc. may be cited as notable examples of this 'whole-manism' in poetry.

Tagore, although a master of the art of dramatic contrast and variation in his dramatic and narrative poetry, remains a lyric poet almost wholly 'melodic', that is, devoted to the technique of a single movement, however modulated or diversified within itself, in a single poem. The method of differentiating personal reactions at any given moment, or over a period of time, sufficiently so as to give them independent value and identity and then putting them in a certain order in order to produce a final effect which must not only include but overpass the different parts was certainly not unknown to him. But he never tried his hand at it so far as one can see, unless in poem no. 5 of *Patraput* one sees an approximation.

#### ELIOT'S SOLUTION

Eliot has described what he supposes to be the technique of poetry as 'amalgamation of disparate experience'. The difference between this and Yeats's 'harmony' is this that

Yeats's units of experience are all positive, that is acceptable in their own right as fruitful themes for poetry. Not that he has summarily dismissed all suffering and conflict, but he gave these no place till they touched some sympathetic chord in the mind or heart or evoked some genuine response in the poet's consciousness. It was his ardent poetic endeavour to expand the heart and the intelligence so as to embrace even what appeared to be discordant and disastrous and make even these yield some new gleam of truth. Even in the midst of countrywide disaster, the poet in him triumphed the moment he could discern and declare that 'a terrible beauty is born'. He took his cue from the Greek dramatists whose tragic chorus danced and sang. No experience, however important in itself, had right of entry into poetry if it failed to show the testimony of the poet's delight – this was what Yeats firmly believed even in the face of a disintegrating world. And his achievement also has been in the direction of a new and bold affirmation of life and world-experience.

But all or most of the experimental units of Eliot are 'negative' in character. All that they serve to do is to carry an undesirable situation or an unpleasant moment irresistibly to an intolerable climax. These elements or materials are culled from the same pale world of despondence, they do not belong to different orders or levels of experience. But although these units represent the same atmosphere and mood, they present different voices exploiting the same key-board for the expression of varied sentiments and feeling-tones, as also characters and images which help to vivify and bring together all possible reactions within the given situation. This technique shows an indebtedness to Ezra Pound's 'imagism' which also influenced Yeats. But Yeats always presented his images to his readers after having expanded them somewhat for intelligibility and treated them with feeling to make them acceptable. Eliot's practice, on the contrary, is apparently to string together a series of disconnected or contradictory images and feeling-tones

almost in the manner of the night-marish fantasies of surrealists. But in reality, it is not so. In weaving these images and reactions, and building up a representative pattern which he has named the 'objective correlative', Eliot has evinced the genius of a highly gifted musical composer. Each item in his representative pattern may indeed be unpleasant, tiresome, disquieting or annoying, simply because of its senselessness and irrelevance. None, indeed, of these units are beautiful, delightful or deserving of genuine poetical acceptance on their own merit. But that final sanction is there in the receiving consciousness of the poet-artist where all these discords cause an intensive disturbance, an unusual upsurge of feeling, which would not rest till it broke down some barrier somewhere and led to some new and wider field of realisation. Eliot's way is indeed very much similar to that of Baudelaire and Rimbaud – as we have shown earlier – which is to create a succession of shocks that would inevitably drive one on to deeper realms of experience. In Eliot's *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, for instance, the many curious and apparently incongruous images and incidents lead on to the final moment of an extreme sense of disequilibrium and tension when the street lamp admonishes the vagrant of the night to sleep and 'prepare for life'. The sequence of images and sentiments preceding this last image turns it into a sharp and devastating instrument of irony. The poem actually ends with the poet's comment which follows immediately after – 'The last twist of the knife', and then it is suddenly brought home to the wondering reader how a crowd of apparently insignificant incidents has assumed the gravity of a heart-breaking tragedy. The outstanding achievement of Eliot in this field was not given the recognition it deserves either by Yeats or by Tagore.

Having always occupied themselves with materials of a positive character, they were, it seems, unable to appreciate the poignancy and poetical effectiveness which can be reached through an ordered succession of 'negative' elements. The

reason why Tagore chose Eliot's *Journey of the Magi* for translation into Bengali was because in that poem alone the dramatic assemblage and ordering of the elements are consistently of a positive nature. He wrote his "Sisu-tirtha" in the same manner. His poem "Prashna" ("The Question"), though somewhat similar in mood to the agonised spirit of Eliot's poetry, remains in its accents personal and lyrical, not a harmonic combination of disparate elements. The mad Lear may be turned out of a community whose guiding stars are sanity and wisdom, but the poetical validity and potency of King Lear in the drama or in the consciousness of its creator Shakespeare cannot be doubted. It is sad to think that Tagore, so uniquely catholic and large-hearted in his appreciations, missed or neglected this kind of poetic excellence. The turbid sentimentality and gross, almost drunken exuberance of the Shakespeare fans among his early associates, as described by Tagore himself may have permanently prejudiced him against this kind of poetry.

By means of imagination and reflection closely linked with sensory vibrations resulting from direct perception and felt acutely in the marrow of his bones, as Eliot himself explained, Eliot has welded into a whole the diverse and discordant elements of cotemporary life. From this, the reader is expected to get an extended view of reality which would be somewhat like that of the Greek seer Tiresias, who saw all the three dimensions of time : past, present and future : Eliot, indeed, has sought to place the world-awareness of a Tiresias at the centre of his poetry.

Apart from this extension of consciousness, Eliot has also another poetical aim, as has already been pointed out : to pierce open the surface reality and reach some inner recess of deeper experience. In this respect, Eliot indeed is a poet of cessation, that is some sort of *Nirvana* or *Nirvritti* as Indian metaphysical thought would describe it, a final heaven of rest, 'the still point' — as he describes it. Yeats was inspired by the

proneness of the Greek chorus to dance and sing. But Eliot has found room in his poetry for suspense and a sense of catastrophe and sought through these to arrive at Catharsis, the goal which the Greek tragedians also had in view. Eliot's poetical production is not very ample, but his success in making a stream of poetry flow in a desert of ennui, and pain even within the small compass of his total output, has to be given its due praise. Bengali poetry is quite undeveloped in this respect. When one begins to appreciate Eliot's poetic heart functioning in this grim sphere of reality, one ceases to view with annoyance the images of decadence in contemporary life which fill the pages of Eliot's poetry and learns to give them their proper place and importance in a vaster world of thought and feeling. As an example, the following well-known lines may be cited from *Waste Land* :

'When lovely woman stoops to folly and  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone.'

#### RILKE

Tagore invokes in his poetry a world of eternal values which cover up and transmute evil. Sex is there transformed into diverse reactions of the mind, the heart, the idealised higher mind or the innermost mind or soul – into feelings and attitudes of attraction, sympathy and compassion, sense of co-existence, love. Even in cases where he had to deal with physical infatuation and lust, he has looked at its primal turbulence and tension with the calm and compassionate eyes of a Sannyasi Upagupta or even the Buddha, as depicted in his poetry, so that even the most noxious poison has somehow turned into nectar. Two pre-eminent examples of this are to be found in the dance-dramas *Shyama* and *Chandalika*. But these are instances of transformation and transcendence. To



accept sex, the bliss of bodily enjoyment as such and to reach through it a higher sense of beauty and delight, even a sort of spiritual sublimity of experience — this is something which one hardly finds in Tagore. This is because, although his perception of the physical, the body beautiful, his reactions to the many dimensions and configurations of the material are pure, varied and extensive, all these tend to merge into a vaster mental-spiritual consciousness within which the physical is unable to retain its ordinary 'reality'. His love also is tinged with the radiance of renunciation. The achievement of Rilke lies in conserving and preserving ordinary sense enjoyment, body-consciousness and all the typical experiences of life in a material world within the unity and innocence of a pure youthful soul and using this as a spring-board for rising freely into the upper air of beauty and spirit-consciousness. If Rilke had borrowed the art of metaphysical poets and sought to argue his readers into the acceptance of this immediate and unimpeded life-enjoyment, that attempt would surely have been looked upon as a sort of neo-Epicureanism and straight-away rejected. But Rilke has not cared merely to think or talk, he has, like Greek masters of art, built up a world of angelic experience through unwavering, vivid, almost concrete forms of beauty and bliss. Yeats's Ribh although a churchman, is given to sensuality and the whole thesis of his Crazy Jane is that even in man's sex-impulse and other forms of desire there always lurks a higher, she would say, divine, impulse. But Rilke's monk does not make a plea, or advance a thesis, he just holds up before the eyes of all who want to see how the worldly and the divine mingle and merge through a spontaneous, continuous stream of experience ; how the same sense of bliss shoots up like a tree, like a sky-kissing tower ; how a bridge can be constructed between the subconscious and the super-conscious. The scope of Rilke's experience is limited, 'personal' as opposed to what one would call impersonal and vast, but his poetry is a very notable example of an upward

movement, a high transcendence in modern poetry. One may detect in Rilke the aesthetic sense of Greek sculptors and the unremitting impulsion of Beauty which moved Keats, but these find expression in Rilke's poetry after they have completely met the claims of modern 'realism' and at the same time satisfied the hunger of the soul for 'inner truth'. One of Rilke's short poems is quoted below to show his felicity in the domain of the experience described.

## ANGELS

See how the Angels feel through far-off space  
How keenly unceasingly they feel,  
Beside their red flame our white heat is cool –  
See how the Angels glow through distant space.  
While to us – more than this we do not know –  
The feeling resisted once, once happens in vain ;  
But they stride on, transported to attain  
their goal – through their vast radiant spheres they go.

Tagore's specific approach to these modern problems has already been briefly stated and commented on in the course of foregoing account of the poetical achievement of Yeats, Eliot and Rilke. Yeats was particularly enchanted by the palpable and vigorous fusion of the ideal and the real in his *Gitanjali*. A deeper and more careful analysis of this aspect we find in the writings of Ezra Pound : 'In the work of Tagore the source of the charm is in the subtle underflow. It is nothing else than his sense of life'. And again ; – 'Briefly, I find in these poems a sort of ultimate common sense'.

In the last few years of Tagore's life, his protracted and painful illness and the agony of the spirit which he had to suffer as a helpless witness of the Crisis in Civilization which he had striven for years to avert, brought some recompense to his spirit by tearing open the veil and giving him glimpses of a deeper truth. A glowing evidence of this truth-sense and

truth-vision which could hold and harmonize even the fiercest opposition of ideas and ways, of forces of good and evil is to be found in Tagore's later poetry beginning with *Prantik* and continuing right up to his very last days.

## MODERN POETRY AND TAGORE'S PARADOX

RABINDRANATH, in an article on modernism in poetry, published a few years before his death, said that this modernism was something "eternally modern". This gave an excellent handle to a group of literary persons who were just at that moment eagerly looking out for opportunities of opposing Tagore, hoping thereby to win their way to a reputation for originality. A paradox of course it was, and the poet meant it to be so. But whereas for the poet it had a deep meaning that justified this bold oxymoron, to the critics it was only a poetic way of clouding the issue and saying nothing in beautiful language. A study however of those poets and critics of England who are supposed to be most competent to speak on this subject with authority would show that there is substantial agreement between their view of what is truly modern in poetry and the view taken by the poet. An analysis is attempted here of the views of T. S. Eliot. It is interesting to note that, in their final stand, the two most distinguished English poets of modern times, W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, are in agreement, as will be shown in this essay.

The question is, what is the aim of modern poetry ? Eliot's answer is not clear ; the sudden flashes of intuitive perception that give Eliot's critical writings their value, ignore by their very nature the necessity of an underlying interrelation among the different aspects of his theory, of a sound logical structure uniting the parts into a whole, so that he seems to have, not one aim, but a multiplicity of aims. Each of the aims seems to draw its support from a distinct train of thoughts of which it is the logical conclusion ; but neither are these different sequences of thought clearly and systematically expressed, nor are they articulated with one another.

All these aims, more or less betray a belief in the possibility of a further development of poetry – a progress either in the direction of greater variety or of an improved quality. Only one of these aims interprets the newness of the poetry it envisages in terms of time, makes modernism synonymous with contemporaneity. But the other two – for there are three chief recognisable aims – tend to detach the notion of time from the concept of modernism and use the latter in a special, absolute sense. The second aim seeks to extend the critical perspective over the whole field of World's literature and to determine the individual poet's relative position therein. The third aim looks into the nature of the poetic process and endeavours to arrive at perennial truths, "laws" governing the art of making poetry. If modernity must be judged by these aims, the word "modern" indeed will have to be stretched a good deal to contain a far wider meaning than it originally had, – a suggestion of universal values.

The three aims, with their lost links supplied and implicit assumptions made explicit, may perhaps be stated as follows :

*First Aim.* Progress in human thought and sciences, as well as changes in national and international situation have been responsible for considerable changes in human life and civilization. It is the duty of poetry to reflect in some manner these changed times, to be born, as it were, with a birth-mark that would serve to distinguish twentieth-century poetry from the poetry of the preceding ages. A modern poet, therefore, instead of withdrawing himself into a private world of his own, a dreamland, should show in his poetry a keen awareness of whatever characterises his own age.

But this "awareness of one's age" is a vague and ambiguous expression. What it means, how it is related to tradition and in what manner it can be cultivated, are questions that have already been discussed elsewhere.\* The question remains how

\* See above "Tradition and Modern Poetic Thought", pp. 1-12.

it should find expression in poetry. Most poets of course decided that it was by choosing modern themes, describing modern conditions and situations and voicing modern sentiments that one could fulfil this requirement. But this method was very soon found out to be very superficial by the more talented poets. A poet of course should be fully alive in his own time. But it was more or less realised that the evidence of this aliveness should be there in the whole *texture* of his poetry, in his general attitude and even in his perception of rhythm. This is really what Eliot means when he suggests that a modern's perception of rhythm has probably been affected by the internal combustion engine. Anyhow after nearly three decades of theorising and experimentation, "awareness" now seems, except in case of some who are merely after sensationalism and commercial success, to have lost much of its force as a specific aim.

*Second Aim.* The total reality of the human universe is changeless. The art of poetry also is a mental process discovered long ago by man and, barring lapses and erratic deviations at intervals, practically continuing unchanged up to the present day. So the question is not that of creating a new reality or teaching poetry to function in an altogether new manner, but to continue using this power more extensively, either comprehending thereby, in concentric circles, as it were, more and more of the eternal reality, or, in the absence of supreme geniuses who alone can do that properly (i. e. assimilate the whole past tradition of poetry and improve it in height of attainment, depth or width), utilising, as far as possible, the accumulated experience of the past, which makes the modern age what it is as a sort of vantage-ground, and from that new point of view trying to explore what has not yet been explored.

Exploring what is unexplored at once suggests new subjects, new materials ; and it is here that the first aim merges in the second. But, as has already been observed, the new "point of

view" has been found infinitely more important and productive than new matter.

This aim explains the true relation between the new poet and all his predecessors taken together, the new poetry and the whole bulk of the poetry of preceding ages. If the new poet is one of supreme, unprecedented genius, he will realise in his poetry all the wealth of past poetic experience and in addition thereto contribute something of his own, thus setting up a new record of maximum attainment, pushing the *art* of poetry as a whole one step further towards its climax. The emergence of a poet like this, if at all likely, must be a matter of centuries or even thousands of years. The duty therefore of the genuine, though lesser, poets who write in the meanwhile, should be to try to supplement and not merely to borrow from or repeat older poetry, so that it may be possible for poetry as a whole, not the poetry of this poet or that, to gain increased completeness, a widened circumference of meaning. Eliot's famous, if enigmatic, observation on the relative value of the new poet and the criterion of his newness, ( which has frequently been misunderstood ), can only be properly understood in the light of this aim :

"No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.... The existing order is complete before the new work arrives ; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered ; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted, and this is conformity between old and new."

One or two expressions in the passage quoted may raise disputes. But on the whole, this is an acceptance of variety in poetry. Based on what may be called a "theory of relativity", it envisages the possibility of different points of view and different modes of poetic expression. The aim indeed is not to break away from the past and run amuck, but to make

a *unique* contribution that will at once take its place among other works of art as of one family, by virtue of a broad affinity and at the same time have its individual, special worth by virtue of its difference from any other known work of art. As a corrective to the way of thinking which gives exaggerated importance to the romantic poets and views their mode as the only desirable mode in poetry, this aim has served a very useful purpose. Poetry is not like an exchequer that it can be augmented merely by the addition of greater amounts of the same kind. It is rather like an association of men where each new member conforms as a matter of course to the rules of membership but is valued in accordance with his own integrity, his special capabilities, his uniqueness. Poets of today, as of old, who have nothing new to offer, have very often put forward a plea of "uniqueness" in defence of their idiosyncracies, their incompetence. But that uniqueness proper is a criterion of art was recognised long before, and although it may have needed a new emphasis in our age, it cannot be said to constitute a very modern aim. The really modern aim is as follows.

**Third Aim.** In exploring the world of microbes and bacteria, the first prerequisite is a good microscope; and in exploring the mystery of the eternal spaces, a powerful telescope. The more correct and powerful the instrument in each case, the more reliable and comprehensive will be the discovery. The same rule applies in case of poetical discoveries. The mental process which constitutes an act of poetry should be so adjusted that the errors of misapprehension, partial apprehension, blurred or distorted vision, may be avoided and the "whole man" may be left free to react through that mental process, at all levels of its existence simultaneously – ranging from bodily sensations to the highest intellectual and emotional activity. The true aim of a modern poet should then be to achieve this new poise, whereby a simultaneous quickening of his whole personality (which is another name for imperso-



nality) may be made possible. In this manner he will not only be able to make new poetry but to give birth to a better and much more genuine (scientific ?) poetry than ever before.

Eliot, in common with many other thinkers of today, holds that "reality" is something alien. The modern poet should develop a degree of objectivity in his mental outlook, if he is to make anything out of this brute reality. Most of the preceding poets failed to attain this objectivity, because they suffered from what Eliot calls "dissociation of sensibilities". Thus the romantic poets lacked "wit" and the power of "irony"; Browning even lacked adult intelligence; and even if one admits that Tennyson and Browning "are poets and they think", Eliot finds that "they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose"; then again, "Milton and Dryden triumphed with a dazzling disregard of the soul"; and even though, Blake had a naked, sincere mind, he was wanting in common sense, "impersonal reason". Hence Eliot concludes, "when a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience", and in doing so it may even have to "look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system and the digestive tracts."

It will have been seen that this aim tends to make the art of poetry so very scientific that it would judge poetry in terms almost of right and wrong. Whereas the second aim is based on a belief in the relativity of all poetic performances, in their supplementary character and in a consequent possibility of infinite variety, this aim tends towards absolutism, towards a faith that the poetic process can be so perfected scientifically that, in the end, there will be only one recognised and authentic manner in which the poet's mind will function. This inherent contradiction between the theory of a poet's relative significance and that of the perfectibility of the poet's art has either eluded Eliot's attention or baffled him completely. In fact, Eliot's inability to co-ordinate these two sequences of thought accounts for the strain of self-contradiction running

through the whole of his life and work, his traditionalism on the one hand and modernism on the other, his dogmatism in the earlier critical writings and moderation in the later, his initial want of faith and final recourse to religion.

The last aim, taken by itself, is not above criticism. One may argue that a poet in trying to get all the component forces of his personality to work together may end with something not unlike the phenomenon of equilibrium of forces as described in General Physics, something in the nature of a Buddhist's Nirvāna. If, however, the combination is to remain dynamic, it must be due to some inequality among the forces. And it is inconceivable that, in any two poets even, the different elements of their personality will ever combine in a fixed proportion resulting in the same final attitude. Psychology on the contrary asserts that, even in the most elementary responses of the human mind, all its factors, faculties or powers, whatever they may be called, combine inextricably, although the resultant behaviour may sometimes be predominantly intellectual, sometimes emotional and sometimes intuitive or instinctive. And if one shakes himself free of the modern repugnance towards romanticism and accepts or tolerates the attitude of the romantic poets, he will find no dearth of "amalgamation of disparate experience" in their best poetry.

This criticism, however, does not detract from the intrinsic merit of the aim, although it may serve to purge the aim of its exaggerations, its dogmatic exclusiveness. In its insistence on a greater amplitude of the mental outlook and on the presence of a certain objectivity in the final attitude, it has really opened up a new path for poetry, it has taught how to assimilate the greatest gift of our times—the scientific spirit—into poetry. Of course we cannot enter here into a discussion of the achievements in this direction of Eliot and his followers. But it is significant that even Yeats, in speaking admiringly of the young poets, Day Lewis, Madge and Mcneice, and their "intellectual passion", says: "We have been gradually

approaching this art through the cult of sincerity, that refusal to multiply personality which is characteristic of our time. Here stands not this or that man but man's naked mind."

And Rabindranath evaluates the same kind of poetry in this language : "If you ask me, what is pure modernism, I shall answer : to view 'reality', not through one's own personality, but in an unprejudiced, objective manner. Such an experience would have a pure undimmed lustre, and yield a genuine joy (*ānanda*) which can be derived from nothing else. Modern poetry turns its full gaze, through a non-attached mind, on the universe, just as modern science seeks through analysis to reach a detached understanding of the same reality ; - and this is what is eternally modern."

## RABINDRANATH AND BENGALI LITERATURE

IT IS EASY ENOUGH to write a casual article on Rabindranath. But nothing can be more difficult than to present a consistent account of even a single aspect of his many-sided achievement. Poetry, drama, fiction or prose writings – whichever of those be chosen by the literary critic, he will be confronted not only with a formidable bulk of writings which he must study thoroughly, but also with an amazing variety of purpose and pattern within the same genre. Rabindranath is not difficult in the sense in which some of the modern writers like James Joyce or T. S. Eliot are difficult. Different classes of his writings directly appeal to the minds of different types of persons. But it is most difficult to arrange and classify these impressions and build a framework to hold them all. The critic of Rabindranath must bring to his work the utmost catholicity of interests and breadth of outlook ; and even if he does he is likely to discover many unfamiliar tracts and unplumbed depths in his work. He must be as sharp and nimble-witted as possible ; and yet he will find Rabindranath constantly eluding his grasp and making for unknown distances sooner than he can overtake him.

Such being the case it is not at all surprising that significant criticism of Rabindranath till now has been so meagre. Edward Thompson's *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist*, seems so far to be most outstanding, the most ambitious and conscientious work in this field. Within the limits he has

\* *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist*, By Edward Thompson. Oxford University Press, 2nd Edition , Pp. 330. Price Rs. 10/-.

*Bengali Literature* By J. C. Ghosh. Oxford University Press, Pp. 198. Price 15 s.

prescribed for himself he has missed nothing of moment that scholastic labours could obtain, and has done everything in his power to remove hindrances between himself and a clear view of his subject. His mind, nourished by what is best in Western literature, is strong enough to explore new regions of thought and experience. Though not altogether free from the influence of Western conventions of literary art, it can react more or less as a free agent to new principles of creative activity and unfamiliar standards of excellence. Edward Thompson has indeed most of the qualities that a good literary critic should possess. He is not too proud to consider evidence other than his own. In fact a vast number of his appraisals derive their strength from corroborative statements either by the Poet himself or by some one of his Bengal admirers, chiefly Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis. While giving due importance to these opinions, he has yet been solely guided by his own inner light ; when this light has failed to illuminate, he has frankly expressed his doubts and there are certain cases where, unable to accept notions widely held among the Bengali admirers of Rabindranath, he has expressed his views only after a generous admission of his own limitations.

Criticism can only rationalise what intuition has already obtained. In this respect, all genuine appreciation is more an act of faith than a logical conclusion. Edward Thompson has two such convictions which underlie all his judgements and determine the tone of the book. Firstly, he believes in the greatness of Rabindranath as a man. Secondly, he believes in his greatness both as Poet and Dramatist. He believes more in the former than in the latter. 'The West felt that it could not judge of his work – the poems in translation, at any rate, did not seem to amount to a tremendous deal – but it could feel the greatness of his mind and soul'. This is Thompson's analysis of the Western attitude to Rabindranath, and he himself must have been sustained by a similar faith during his life-long enquiry into Rabindranath's literary achievement. The

book under review contains the fruits of his long labours and shows through what doubts and difficulties a very sincere critical mind arrives at its final estimate of the Poet's greatness. The vast improvement in outlook and understanding that the present edition shows makes it an altogether different book from the first edition. But even here Thompson does not make any dogmatic assertion. He is most cautious and moderate in his claim. He affirms that Rabindranath's place is *not be ow* the rank of such literary figures as Victor Hugo, Wordsworth etc. And he is content to *suggest* that it may be even higher, that Rabindranath's place may ultimately be with the few greatest writers of all times. He thinks that Rabindranath's countrymen are right in claiming that he is the greatest lyric poet of the world. He himself establishes on ground of his own inner testimony the dramatic greatness of Rabindranath, who according to him is with the greatest in this respect also, if not of them. The only point about which he is diffident is whether the Poet can be classed with a Shakespeare or a Dante.

The limitations of the book are obvious. The author has set himself a number of tasks which it is impossible to carry out within a single book like this. He has attempted to give in the opening chapter an account of earlier Bengali literature as a background of Rabindranath's work. He has traced the life-story of Rabindranath from beginning to end devoting a proportionately large amount of space to it. Several whole chapters towards the end of the book are purely biographical. He has to divide the remaining space between the consideration of Rabindranath's poetry and that of his dramatic writings, and interspersed even among these are passing notices or short accounts of his prose writings. This has necessarily precluded a full exposition of the two major aspects chosen. *Balākhā* and *Palātākā* among poetical writings and *Phālguni* among the dramas are the last books to receive critical consideration. The numerous publications which came later have either been

merely mentioned or omitted altogether. Thus books like *Purabi*, *Syāmali Bithikā* and among the later dramas, *Natir Pujā* and *Red Oleanlers* are not even mentioned. He dismisses all of Rabindranath's work after his sixtieth year with a quotation from an essay by Buddhadeva Bose in the *Golden Book of Tagore* who says that if Tagore had written nothing else he would still be at the head of Bengal letters. One cannot but sympathise with this ardent admirer and student of Rabindranath. It was after a prolonged, heroic struggle with a foreign language and a restless genius who broke new ground till the last day of his life, that Thompson chose to part company with the Poet at what seemed to him to be a point of culmination in the poet's career. Even in Bengal, there are very few who have gone the whole length with Rabindranath ; most indeed, knowing themselves unable to overtake this eternal wayfarer, have stopped midway at self-chosen places of rest.

Nor do all the works that fall under the period chosen receive adequate notice. Thompson's own preferences which no doubt he shares with his Western readers, come strongly into play in the matter of emphasis and allocation of space. He gives rather an elaborate treatment to poems which are social, political, descriptive, narrative or merely fanciful. In this he does indeed a service by bringing to the Western readers aspects of Rabindranath unfamiliar to them and thus helping to correct their one-sided view of Rabindranath's genius. Thompson's treatment of these poems is as a rule perfectly competent and convincing and some of the verse-translations of these poems done by him deserve to be preserved ; but still it must be said that these poems usurp too much space which could have been better utilised. And one or two of these poems in the original are unimportant even in their own class. One suspects that in these cases Thompson was impressed by the idea expressed rather than by its value as expression, its poetic worth. Creation, Conservation and Destruction is one

such poem. The Poet's Fancy, which Thompson translates is such another. It only proves how difficult it is to be a sure judge of a poetry written in a language not one's own, even for one who has tried hard to master the language. Much of Thompson's unresponsiveness to certain classes of Rabindranath's poems may indeed be due to this failure on his part to see where language over-steps the limits of its meaning and becomes sheer beauty or feeling or power.

In his appraisal of Rabindranath's poetry Thompson finds few occasions to differ from the best critical opinion in Bengal. In many cases he does no more than simply quote from or summarise current Bengali criticism. The poems that he chooses to illustrate the highest flights of Rabindranath's poetical genius would at once show the unanimity. They are, for instance, *Urvashi*, *Farewell to Heaven*, *Ahalya*, *Varshasesh*, *Vaisakh*, *Balaka*, *Shajahan*, *Chanchala* etc. Most of these poems have been translated by Thompson himself for the benefit of Western readers, even though English translations of most of them had already been included in Rabindranath's English publications. It was certainly a very daring experiment and it must be admitted that in some cases at least Thompson had a great measure of success. Had he done more of this work, choosing the pieces that really touched the depths of his heart, it would have surely helped the study of Tagore in the West. The English language has enriched itself with practically all that is best in world literature. We have no doubt that sooner or later the demand will come to include in it what is best in Tagore literature. And we feel this work can be best done by young and enterprising Englishmen willing to follow the lead of Edward Thompson.

But Thompson does not identify himself wholly with Bengali attitude to Rabindranath's poetry. In his approvals, he is at one with Bengali critics except in a few cases of personal choice. He does well indeed to draw attention to the detailed observation so unusual in Bengali poetry in the poem *Noon* or



to the grandeur and force of the poems bearing on land and sea-storm. His enthusiasm for the narrative poems in *Kathā*, *Kāhini* and *Palātakā* has that ring of personal conviction and enjoyment which one is apt to look for in the best criticism. But where he disapproves, he stands alone. Although he talks about the gracefulness, beauty and technical excellence of *The Golden Boat* poems, his heart does not respond to many of them. He discovers in them a 'miasma of zenana imagery'; and an obsession with such images as 'mother' or 'nuptial chamber'. He also finds a certain thinness of quality in *Kalpanā*, *Kheyā* and *Kshanikā*, though he praises some of the poems included in these books. He believes that the preponderance of ornaments weakens much of the poetry in *Chitrā*, in which the Poet 'embroidered the margins of truth treating it as a missal to be illuminated.' *Lipikā* provides him with instances of 'sledge-hammer emphasis on the trivial'. He does not know what to say about the Jivandevata phase.

As Thompson's judgment of mystic poetry is based, on his own admission, on personal taste and preference, we need not take it seriously. But what demands serious notice is the analysis he gives of the defects in Tagore's poetry considered as a whole. He finds in this poetry a certain monotony which, according to him, results from the frequent repetition of identical themes, images and sentiments. 'Rabindranāth rarely rested content with a thing well-done once...he explores and exploits the same emotion far too much'. This monotony is not one of fashion, as in England, but one of tradition, he says. Secondly, he finds this poetry unequal, in spite of its unfailing technical excellence. It is an inequality in thought and matter due, he thinks, to a certain mental laziness and want of grip.

About the first objection we can say that we know of no other poet in world literature who has a greater and finer variety of thought, feeling and form to his credit. And Thompson is not unaware of this. His real objection is to the frequency of certain symbols and images. This repetition is a

fact. In the best poems, these images and symbols appear in their full glory ; they seem to be born out of the stress of poetic emotion, unique and all-important because they fulfil an inner need which nothing else could. In the vast majority of kindred poems, they still retain their potency, though they play a comparatively minor role. They do not serve as focal points as in the former class, but simply as side-lights. There are again poems in which they function like ordinary words, units of expression that make up the whole. No extra value attaches to them as in the first two cases, but they form a groundwork of meaning and sentiment, at once concise and effective, upon which the poet can easily shape and build his poetical motif. Among these last-named poems there may be some that are below Rabindranath's average level of attainment, but they are proportionately few in number. A poet is to be condemned when his use of words or symbols becomes simply a matter of conceit or convention, contributing nothing to the poem. We are quite sure that Rabindranath, very seldom, if at all, wrote such poetry.

The second defect, that of inequality, if proved, would include and be mostly a result of the first. Thompson admits that Tagore never falls below a certain standard. But that is partly because technical excellence is rather easy of attainment, Thompson thinks, in the Bengali language which is much more pliable than English. But if verse-writing in Bengali is an easy thing to day, we should remember that it is the result of the life-long efforts of a man of giant strength and infinite inventiveness to shape and mould a medium which he found crude and beset with many imperfections. Rabindranath maintains, even at his lowest level, a height of tone and feeling, not because of easy technical skill, but because of the normal elevation of his mind and spirit. Supposing that the poetic achievement of a particular poet could be graphically represented, one would presumably measure the value of the poetry by three things taken separately or together : the highest point it reaches,

its average height, and the horizontal line of its duration at that height. By the last two tests, we have no doubt that Rabindranath will eventually come to be recognised as the greatest poet of the world ; and even by the first his place is secure among the greatest.

But before Rabindranath can find his true place in world literature there should be critics to do what for instance Coleridge and Lamb did for Shakespeare or Carlyle for Goethe. The ground should be cleared to give Western readers the right approach to that considerable section of Rabindranath's poetry in which Thompson detects *zenana* imagery, want of grip and thinness of quality. It should be borne in mind that it would be no less difficult a task to make the Western readers appreciate the beauties and graces of Rabindranath's poetry which have sprung more directly and exclusively from oriental traditions than to create among Indians a taste for European music. Moreover, we must remember that translations from Tagore's works have not only been meagre and inadequate, but in many cases definitely misleading in point of quality and strength. It is sad and depressing to think that a vast number of Rabindranath's lyrics and songs must remain a despair of all translators. Even the utmost ingenuity and mastery of technique would fail to transplant most of them alive in a foreign language. Yet there being no other way to bring them to the majority of readers who have no access to Bengali, the effort has to be made.

And another hard task awaits the interpreter of Rabindranath. The scope and range of criticism as it exists today in the West should be extended, a broader perspective and keener vision should be added to it in order that it may encompass and appraise the gifts of Tagore. It should be convincingly shown that variation is not necessarily repetition, that a poet can very well write more than one poem on what appears to be the same subject but really are altogether new creations differing in spirit and effect. It should be made clear that it

would be no discredit to Shelley if he drew inspiration from the West Wind once again or to Keats if he found the nightingale stirring him to his depths on a second occasion though necessarily in a different manner. Indeed, western critics seem to set too much store by external novelty. At least Thompson's idea seems to be that a poet should deal with a subject e.g. a storm, an ideal of beauty or joy, an aspect of nature etc. only once ; as if a poet could write twice on the *same* theme without ceasing to be a poet ; as if the excitement and interest of the poet were not sufficient proof of the *newness* of the theme, the uniqueness and value of the contents of the alleged repetitive efforts. Then again Thompson and those who are of the same school of thought would deny plenary inspiration to all poetry that has been or is capable of being retouched or altered by the poet. This indeed is an old prejudice. There is nothing to show that Sophocles or Dante or Shakespeare never felt the need of changing and improving their work after they had once done it. 'The poem writing itself' is a fable if it supposes perfect passivity in the poet. It has value as the indication of *one* of the ways in which poetry gets written or as an emphasis on the definiteness or emotional necessity of what forms the core of the poem. Some poems do come finished and whole, as if dictated from above ; some again appear in a more or less crude form and laboriously attain to the perfection which lay implicit in their conception as the tree lies in the seed. How a good poem emerges through a process of chiselling and polish may be illustrated by the practice of a great modern poet, W. B. Yeats. And indeed examples of such writings are obtainable in the work of most of the poets of the world who have stood the test of time. In Rabindranath we find abundant evidence of both the processes of poetic creation.

Yet another consideration that the critic should constantly keep in view is this : Poetry which touches life at innumerable points is capable of an almost infinite variety of shade and tone

gradation of height and intensity. The sublimities of the classics of every literature do not make lighter lyrical touches, as in Herrick, for example, valueless. Even light-heartedness and dilettantism may claim their proper poetic expression. Not that this is not understood. But the difficulty is that critics who would welcome different types of poetry in different poets, would be suspicious of variety of types in one and tempted to call it 'unequal'. Thanks to Aristotle, critical notions regarding drama seem today to be clearer and more adequate, than in regard to other kinds of poetry. Shakespeare will be acclaimed even for the patches of low comedy one finds in his earlier plays, for creating the character of a worthless buffoon or a snob and finding appropriate language for him. This will be claimed as a proof of his myriad-mindedness, and we think, rightly. But a western critic is apt to be utterly confused when he comes across the light and buoyant poetry of *Kṣhānikā* or the polished and glitter of the elegant verses in *Mahūā*. He would applaud Shakespeare all the more because he cannot classify and label his genius ; but he must call a great poet who writes non-dramatic poetry 'unequal' or inconsistent, if he cannot hold his genius inside a critical formula. If there is anything in the history of world literature that would bear comparison with the many-sidedness of Tagore's poetic genius, it is the genius of Shakespeare.

Our observation regarding the standard of dramatic criticism would seem justified by Thompson's achievement. His real and original contribution lies indeed in his very sincere and able criticism of Rabindranath's dramatic writings, regular plays as well as shorter pieces written in dialogue form, monologues in the manner of Browning and narrative poems as in *Kathā* and *Palātakā*. Here one feels, Thompson is on sure ground. His prejudice against the character of Grandfather, his half-hearted appreciation of *Phālguni* and *Rājā* and his complete misunderstanding of the value of *Achalāyatan* may indeed be disregarded in view of the pioneering work he has

done in bringing out Rabindranath's excellent qualities as a dramatist.

J. C. Ghosh's *Bengali Literature* is definitely an important contribution to the history of that literature. The author has a two-fold advantage. Being a Bengali he has been able to support and enrich fruits of his research with his personal observation and understanding of life and manners in Bengal ; and by virtue of his western education he has brought to his work some of the best qualities of western scholarship : clarity, thoroughness, precision, sense of proportion. His presentation even of the most complicated issues is as a rule lucid and attractive, showing a highly disciplined mind and a firm grip over his materials. The account that he gives of the religious movements and social and political forces that according to him, have influenced Bengali literature may not in every case be beyond dispute, but it is always plausible and thought-provoking. Although the scope chosen is up to the end of the nineteenth century, the author has included a chapter on Rabindranath in view of his importance. The author has tried to mete out even-handed justice to the notable literary figures in Bengali literature, rescuing some of them from undeserved neglect and divesting some others of the uncritical praise they used to enjoy. His judicial method does not seem to go wrong as long as he is occupied with comparatively lesser figures. But when he deals with the most important writers like Bankimchandra, Saratchandra and Rabindranath, his method seems to become arbitrary to a considerable extent. He shows himself rather too ready to find faults, because, of course, there must be the defects to counterbalance the merits of a great writer. Not that some of the defects that he mentions are not true. But they have often been given a disproportionate emphasis. And there are some which exist only in the imagination of the author. For example he finds Rabindranath 'always most pleasant and charming', but 'rarely moving and convincing'. " Again, 'very few poets outside the popular magazines

have been so given to conceits and cliches as Tagore 'was'. He sees nothing more in Saratchandra Chattopadhyay than that he has imported artificial problems of sex and psychology from third-rate European novels. Bankim appears to him to be wholly sentimental and unintelligent. After an enumeration of such defects he proceeds to make sweeping statements regarding the value and importance of these writers. Bankimchandra is a very mediocre novelist, according to him. Although Saratchandra does not come under his scope, his passing reference to him shows that he regards him as a third-rate writer. He has words of praise for Rabindranath of course and on the whole admits his greatness as a poet. But his comments purporting to bring out Rabindranath's faults betray, we are afraid, an inadequate knowledge and hasty judgment on the part of the commentator. The suspicion is bound to arise that the author's acquaintance with Rabindranath's works is in the main through the English versions, and his critical approach to him is mainly through the framework fashioned by Edward Thompson, the author's 'old teacher'. He has improved upon the text of his teacher by accentuating the faults mentioned by the latter and adding to them some of his own invention. But the respectfulness and sense of justice that keep Thompson's remarks sober and undogmatic and give them the character of suggestions rather than that of final judgment are entirely absent in his treatment. In his eagerness to profit by the lessons of correctness and balance he has learned from the West, J. C. Ghosh has allowed his appreciation to suffer. He seems to forget that the major task of a critic is to enter into the mind and spirit of the writer chosen and that judgment can function only after these continued efforts at self-identification have yielded the richest results.

## TAGORE AS POET-EDUCATOR

THE BEGINNINGS OF educational thinking may be traced back to the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, to Confucius and Laotze, to Plato and Aristotle. But systematic thinking on education is of comparatively recent origin, and the attempt to set educational problems against the vast background of human life and civilization and relate programmes and methods of education to the process of evolution is still more recent. One naturally thinks of those who have now come to be known as the great educators : Rousseau (1712-78 ), Pestalozzi ( 1746-1827 ), Froebel ( 1782-1852 ), and Dewey 1859-1922.

Success in the task these men set themselves would naturally demand, not only outstanding intellectual ability, but a large measure of imagination and insight, a wide range of sympathies and appreciations. The ideal educator must combine in himself the gifts of a philosopher, a poet, a mystic, a social reformer, a scientist and a veritable man of action, because he has to take into account all types of men and their aspirations, all facets of the human personality, all levels of man's experience, all fields of endeavour and achievement. None of the four persons named fulfilled all these requirements, but each of them had a combination of gifts which equipped him for his self-assigned task.

Rousseau who wanted to build his edifice on the truth of uncorrupted human nature was a political and social philosopher and had a profoundly poetic way of looking at man and nature and their kinship.

Pestalozzi was a devout churchman and fervent social reformer who wanted to reform both education and society with the help of what he discovered to be most valuable elements in the life of a pious family : parental love, filial dutifulness,



spirit of service, patiently and carefully executed handiwork, home-science, cottage craft. It is impossible not to liken this great-souled man to Gandhiji whose basic education also has a close resemblance to the experiments of this famous forerunner.

Froebel, son of a clergyman, combined mathematical thinking with a mystical temperament and outlook upon life. He loved nature passionately and had the opportunity of deep and intimate communion with nature during the period of his service as a forest officer. He brought into education the principles of play and joyous experience, sought to relate the growth of human child to what he thought to be the workings of a universal mind. He wanted to transform the school into a beautiful little garden, a kindergarten, to be held open to all the beneficent powers and influences of the world. Here also the resemblance between Tagore and his precursor is unmistakable.

John Dewey, the last great educator the West has given us, who was a great philosopher, a man who towered above his compeers because of his ability to wield the instruments of Scientific Reason and Imagination with a dexterity and thoroughness very few could equal, was a firm believer in the democratic way of life and in education which alone he thought could make the foundation of democracy secure. A deep student of biological naturalism, he attached great importance to life-experience in the realms both of evolution and education, and held that education was a kind of integral growth which depended on systematic interaction between these life-experiences and the powers of analytical and synthetic thinking. Dewey readily accepted, after careful sifting and selection, much that he valued in Rousseau. An advocate of social experience and socialization of the child, he took over from Pestalozzi's system the congenial, homely atmosphere of intimacy and fellowship, the emphasis on wholesome sentiments and feelings and free and fruitful relationships. From Froebel he learned the playway and the experimental

attitude towards all facts and phenomena of existence. And all these elements he synthesized by a masterly act of synthetic thinking. A great protagonist of the pragmatic school of philosophy, he was interested in that type of thought which could yield practical results in life. Like his great precursors, Pestalozzi and Froebel, Dewey also carried out educational experiments in his Laboratory School, started just a few years before Santiniketan, to see how far his ideas had functional validity. Dewey did not possess the mystical sense of Froebel, the pietistic devotion and spirit of sacrifice which inspired Pestalozzi, nor did he have Rousseau's poetic sensitiveness and sensibilities. Or, even if he had recesses in his mind responsive in some measure to these things, he allowed them entry into his scheme in such changed guise and under such restrictions as to make them seem almost indistinguishable from the purely naturalistic principles and phenomena. Democratic living and Scientific Reason were the two sentinels who held Dewey's world of education completely in their power.

Tagore must have had some acquaintance with Rousseau's ideas and Froebel's Kindergarten system even before he started his school. And by the time he founded his new experiment, the Siksha-Satra, he was fairly conversant with Dewey's school of thought and manner of experiment. Mr. Elmhirst, who was Tagore's valued friend and co-worker at the newly established Rural Reconstruction Centre at Sriniketan and exercised a good deal of influence on the working of the Siksha-Satra experiment, was a product of the Dewey School, although he was also open to the subtler influence of Tagore's personality and approach.

But Tagore's emergence as an educator was completely a matter of personal development, a necessary result of the entire course of his life and experience. He was born in a family which had somehow contrived to turn its place of residence into a veritable nucleus of all types of progressive ideas and activities, a centre of numerous cultural and social movements. And

the many gifted members of this big family represented almost every aspect of human aspiration and accomplishment : spiritual experience, philosophy and the sciences, culture – Eastern and Western, poetry and the arts, music and drama, nation-building and social reform and even business and commerce. And Tagore had a power of acute and manifold reception, an extent of educability perhaps unequalled, or very seldom equalled in man's history. One would probably suggest names like Leonardo da Vinci and Goethe for comparison. Tagore avidly absorbed and assimilated all the rich and varied elements of Eastern and Western culture which met and featured in the daily life lived by his own people at their Jorasanko house. It was because of this unobtrusive but dynamic process of self-education which gave shape and direction to his numerous powers and potentialities that Tagore found his days later on at a traditional school wasteful and oppressive. He had acquired more knowledge about education and its mysteries by successfully subjecting himself to the fullest and most variegated educational experience that one could desire. He discovered for himself and lived all the theories and principles of education which he was later to formulate for himself and use in his Santiniketan experiment. He found much later an endorsement and corroboration of his own ideas in the writings and works of the Western educators.

It will be easily seen that Tagore's many gifts equipped him incomparably as the educator *par excellence*. His mind was always keen and vigorous and masterful, no matter to which interest or branch of knowledge it had to react. He was at home both in the humanities and in the sciences. Dewey's range of interests may be said to have been very wide, but one does not find in him evidence of any remarkable understanding of the more imaginative subjects and arts : poetry, higher and more abstract ranges of philosophy, the subtler and profounder aspects of music and the arts. Tagore shared a deep feeling for nature with Rousseau and Froebel but easily excelled

them in the profundity of his communion with nature and his understanding of the educational implications of such communion. And the tangible embodiment of this realization was the Santiniketan Asram. Unlike Rousseau who hated society and like the three other educators Tagore had a strongly developed sense of community. Although his mind soared to the highest heights of imagination and mystic vision, he found it impossible to live and act except among and for an intimate community of men. মানবের মাঝে আমি বাঁচিবারে চাই – he almost began his poetic career on this note. His contribution in this respect included and supplemented what Pestalozzi and Froebel had done. The mystical element, the symbolic round of play and dance and creative occupations in Froebel's Kindergarten could operate only in an atmosphere of fairyland cut adrift from the rude realities of life. They certainly introduced the children to certain beautiful and universal aspects of existence but they by no means gave them the whole truth of the world they had inherited. Tagore did not limit the function of the mystical element either only to the years of childhood or to a particular section or level of experience. He employed the treasure he had received from his great father mainly and also from other sources to function as the nucleus of all educational experiences and efforts at all stages.

What the Western educators discovered and demonstrated continued to act as a ferment on educational thought and practice from the last decades of the 18th century down to the end of the 19th. And Dewey's educational programme combining as it did all that was unique and enduring in the contribution of the European educators seemed for a time to be the sure remedy for the world's ills. But the high expectations raised by his initial success were not fulfilled. The full implication of this new approach it was difficult even for many of those who adopted it to understand ; moreover, the processes and techniques which had succeeded with small numbers and under controlled circumstances were naturally found to be much less

fruitful when applied on a mass scale. But there<sup>d</sup> also might have been another reason. This scheme might have had in it serious gaps in spite of its apparent comprehensiveness. And the truths of human nature and of individual and collective life on which it was based might not be final ; behind them there might lurk deeper and more abiding truths.

Dewey depended for the maintenance of a norm of behaviour and cultural awareness solely on his suggested scheme of free and intimate mixing and interaction between groups within a democratically organized educational community. Provided that the barriers between the different classes of people and the various interests and creeds were removed, Dewey held, and a free flow of ideas and experiences assured in an atmosphere of mutual goodwill and fellowship, the cultural elements continually renewing themselves and operating through the minds of leading men should keep the community securely on its feet and enable it to meet all situations, solve all problems. But Dewey's hopes were belied by historical developments even before the end of the 19th century, not to speak of what happened later. It was seen how at moments of crisis individual and group behaviour tended to sink to barbarous, almost sub-human levels, how free opportunities for exchange of ideas and sentiments instead of spreading and making generally available what was best in the community's reactions, more readily threw the community at the mercy of scheming party men and power groups and their relentless machinery of propaganda. The march of history faced people and nations with crises which made them look for some less corruptible and more abiding and dependable principles both in the individual and in the life of the collective whole. The ordinary needs, urges and drives recognized by the biological naturalist were not sufficient, nor the social forces and functions which a perfected democratic machinery could release and sustain. The only hope of salvation seemed to lie in being able to find some of the principles and potencies which the old idealists and mystics

had wisely or foolishly believed in and talked about. Dewey's insistence on biology and democracy naturally kept all these things out of the picture. But now the world awaited the emergence of an educator who could retain all that the great educators had done up to that moment and yet find room for certain more potent and abiding principles, who could re-interpret and relate the old wisdom to modern ideas and experience ; who could expound these truths not only intellectually, but authoritatively from personal realization ; who could not only convince people of their existence but could demonstrate their functioning in the lives of men. The answer to this demand came not from the West, but from the East, from India. Missioned, as it were, to fulfil this very expectation, Tagore appeared on the scene as a Poet-Educator just at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Mention must be made here of another circumstance which helped Tagore : his Indian origin – not so much the external, physical fact – but the fact that he earned the title by his power of identifying himself with all that was noblest and best in the tradition of the country. Synthesizing widely varying ideas and ideals, not only by means of intellectual feats of system-making, but by holding and melting all the elements in the crucible of direct personal realization – this has been one of the unique features of India's genius, as has been very lucidly explained by Tagore himself on various occasions. And it was this special power, which helped Tagore to surpass and fulfil even Dewey's phenomenal achievement in synthesis.

Integral education, total education, education of the whole man – these have been the cries of the western educationists for more than a century. And yet their idea of the whole man was quite limited because of their over-emphasis on reason at the expense of the virtues, for instance, that the Greeks desired, the humanistic aspirations and cultural accomplishments the Romans praised, the exciting dreams and idealisms of Victorian England or the mystic elements the ancients and mediaeval

churchmen sought. They failed to detect in these things – even where they were rather crude or mixed up and encrusted with errors and superstitions – certain basic urges of development of man's nature. Tagore retrieved all these neglected principles, removed the obscurity and impurities which covered them and by making these principles shed their light on everything, showed how every single item of experience and fact could be put in its proper place in the whole scheme and how the claims of ordinary nature could be harmonized with those of higher nature or supernature, and how the claims of Reason could not only fit in with, but be fulfilled by the verities of the spirit.

Tagore extended the meaning and functional importance of certain aspects of personality as nobody else had done before him. He raised the imagination, the aesthetic sense and the higher emotions to a position almost equal to that of Reason. These, while operating in spheres of poetry, music and the arts, are almost as important means of discovering reality as Reason. And if one holds, as Tagore did, that the whole sense and purpose of man's life is that he should participate in the world-creator's play of creation by continually new-creating his own personality, one is bound to grant that the faculties and powers of the personality which help creativity are at least as important as Reason. Dewey and Whitehead saw the importance of scientific imagination. And art has in recent years been raised to a position of importance by thinkers like Herbert Read for quite other reasons. But it is not only for the sake of a release of sub-conscious forces or a general softening of the nature or for the development of special aptitudes and accomplishments that Tagore gives them quite a central place in his scheme. They are expected to affect the entire educational atmosphere and programme. Apart from this new emphasis, Tagore exceeds in another respect Dewey's limits. He gives Reason unrestricted scope for its functioning, which Dewey, a staunch supporter of pragmatism and socially useful thinking would not allow. Here Tagore is in the company

of Newman, the eminent advocate of pure Reason and the higher ranges of its movement.

The manner in which Tagore has enlarged and enriched the concept of personality, set it free from all errors of thought, prejudices and wrong emphasis and harmonized its different elements is indeed a miracle of performance. It was possible only because in taking up the role of an educator he had not ceased to be a poet-seer. These roles actually merged into one. That explains how he has been able to override the chief objections of Western rationalistic thought and find a legitimate place for supra-rational phenomena.

One objection is that if the soul or inner person is an already perfected entity which education can only help to unfold, then education loses its meaning and justification completely, and might as well leave the stage to the traditional religious disciplines which are claimed to do the same thing in a more direct and straightforward manner. Moreover, to a modern mind accustomed to think in terms of relativity and change, absolutism in any form, the thought of any unchanging unvarying static reality would be repugnant and unacceptable. Tagore's answer is that the soul is perfect but not changeless and static. It is on the contrary most dynamic and continually self-creative. It has one dimension within the totality of its being where it is absolutely identical with all other souls and with the All-Soul, the Universal Person. But it is also unique in every individual and follows its own peculiar line of evolution or self-creation. The Universal Person sponsors these innumerable individual movements and, holding all these within himself, evolves also his own personality in an endlessly varied progression of new forms and expressions. It is obvious that this view at once meets and quashes all the objections raised by the exponents of evolution and relativity. According to this view, education is and should be a double process of unfolding and self-realization, i. e. new self-creation.

The second objection is : how can one universal principle



give rise to variations, one Universal Person manifest himself in different forms in different individuals? The answer is not really very difficult to find. Even Western thinkers do not find it difficult to believe in Reason as a universal principle. Though indefinable, its nature and functions do not at all seem to be unreal or uncertain or unseizable to its exponents. But this power or principle may find very different kinds of expression and opportunities of functioning in different people, and in spite of all conflicting reasoning and rationalizing processes, and all manner of prejudiced use of this power and its subordination to other impulses and interests of the individual, it is possible for those who know it to retain their faith in its infallibility unshaken. What is true of a universal reason, can also be true of a universal mind, nay, of a full-fledged Universal Person. This is indeed the concept which Tagore takes great pains to expound at length in his *Religion of Man*.

One drawback of applying the democratic philosophy to education is that it removes all external authority and control from the scene and leaves the pupils at the mercy of their own impulses or what is worse—the moods and impulses of the community, which Dewey makes an indispensable and integral part of the learning situation. Tagore, on the other hand, believing as much or more in the freedom of the pupil, yet finds a place of honour for the guru, the teacher, who teaches the child how to find himself and his inner person and with that as his constant guide be for ever free to carry on experiments with the truth of his own being.

And this position solves also another controversial point—the relation between the individual and the society. The individual is free to develop himself to his utmost ability in any direction he chooses, irrespective of any supposed demands of society, provided that he does not fall away from or lose sight of his inner truth. Individual truth being essentially the same thing as the truth behind the collectivity, the service of one is bound to promote the other at least by indirectly influencing

environmental conditions, and sooner or later an open and active interchange is bound to take place. A time must come when the individual following the lead of this inner person comes face to face with the Universal Person and knows that the two Persons are identical. It is no longer necessary for him to depend on democratic goodwill or spirit of fellowship to work for society. Living for himself and living for society become one and the same endlessly thrilling experiment to him. He knows that self-sacrifice and self-discovery are the two faces of an identical phenomenon.

This is, in brief, the message of Tagore. To any possible Western objection that it is not easy for average men to find the inner reality, he would reply that in a properly controlled environment and under genuine teachers that discovery is not only possible for some of the pupils, but easy and inevitable for most of them. In a deeper sense than Rousseau ever attached to Nature, Tagore would join hands with the Bauls of Bengal and quote from the wisdom of their Sahajiya cult to show that the most easy thing for man is to grow into his own eternal nature and truth. The only art necessary is that of being able to dispense with the artificial, the irrelevant, the non-essential elements which cover up and encrust what lies beneath.

Tagore himself described Santiniketan as his 'tangible poem', as the boat that carried the best cargo of his life. There is no doubt that Tagore's pre-eminence as a poet and writer will continue to be recognized down the ages. But there is his own evidence to show that of the three major planes of his creativity, namely personality building, secondly, literary, musical and artistic productions and, thirdly, influencing the lives of men through his Santiniketan experiment, he attached, as his life advanced, the greatest importance to the last. He offered his gains in the two other fields unreservedly for promoting the educational adventure. And people who paid even a single visit to Santiniketan always tended unwittingly to adopt the

appellation 'Gurudeva' in their reference to him, although their previous interest in or attraction for him might have been due to quite other reasons. And this might indeed be an indication that a day may come when the world will recognize and honour him most, not merely as a Poet, but as the Poet-Educator, as Gurudeva.

## THE CENTENNIAL HARVEST

THERE CANNOT BE any doubt that the challenge of the Tagore Centenary, felt by the nation as one of the greatest and, against the background of present world conditions the most significant occasions in its life, has evoked splendid response from all sides and stimulated a tremendous and wide-ranging effort at more conscientious and painstaking study of Tagore. Critics whom nothing short of revelations or thorough re-appraisals acceptable both in this country and in the West would satisfy may still regretfully complain that no such feat of achievement has yet been seen. And those others, mainly reviewers, whose whole critical wisdom consists in intoning the cynical, supercilious voice of the modern University Don, may protest, without taking the trouble of studying the enormous amount of material that has come up that Tagore criticism still continues to be mere unrestrained effusion or at best a careful decking out of well-worn platitudes and other peoples' adulations and observations. But the fact remains that there has been made a not inconsiderable amount of valuable contribution either by way of presenting aspects of Tagore in a more connected and significant manner through compilations of his own writings, or by bringing into focus and unifying into coherent statements all that has been said and can now be said about any of these aspects after all these years of spontaneous praise of uneasy or shrewd denial.

*Towards Universal Man* published on behalf of the Tagore Commemorative Volume Society would naturally take the first place in the class of publications named first. The co-operation of persons, Indian and foreign, having faith in the increasing importance of Tagore's contribution, has combined with the unremitting care and industry shown by the editors

and sponsors to make it a fit vehicle for bringing comparatively little known aspects and ideas of Tagore to his Western admirers.

One thing that has been pushed up most prominently during the spate of centenary revaluation is Tagore's role as a great thinker, a thinker undisputably of world stature. This has been high-lighted in all the publications here under review. Thus Krishna Kripalani refers frequently in his *Tagore : A Life* to the ideas and practical achievements of the man who was 'himself the leading intellectual among his people'. And three well-written chapters in Hiren Mukherjee's *Himself a True Poem* deal with this aspect as their titles indicate : The Thought of a Titan : Nationalism, Internationalism, Socialism ; and Tagore and Indian Freedom. The Centenary Volume brought out by the Sahitya Akademi also contains unmistakable evidence of leading people all over the world being attracted by and drawing inspiration from Tagore's ideas, for instance, on international fellowship and co-operation, the true scope and necessary limits of nationalism, the respective roles of Society and State, the problems connected with industrialisation, the value of sustained constructive efforts as opposed to mere agitations—political or economic. That is to say regarding all the major aspects and problems of modern life the relevance of Tagore's contribution is being more and more widely recognised. And what is more gratifying, the basic spiritual-ethical concepts, the main body of original intuitive thought which determine Tagore's distinctive approach to the various problems of life today—his *Religion of Man* and his notion of an education in keeping with that idea of universal fellowship and onward movement—all these highly idealistic formulations which so long seemed mainly to evoke decision or indifference appear now to command more attention and respect.

The selection of the pieces to be included was certainly not easy, particularly because much of the thought that can

now be offered to the world as relevant was evoked by situations and special occasions in this country and consequently their exposition got mixed up with what may seem now to be merely local or historical. Fortunately, however, India's struggle for independence and the socio-economic problems which form the background of many of these articles were enlivened by the famous Gandhi-Tagore controversies which invest them with a special interest and wide appeal. The public debate of these two great men on the spinning wheel and its usefulness, and Romain Rolland's comment on it have been described or referred to both by Kripalani and Mukherjee in their books and also by Jawaharlal Nehru and Victoria Ocampo in their essays included in the Centenary Volume. Hence it may be presumed that such of Tagore's articles as *The Call of Truth* or *The Striving for Swaraj* may attract, rather than repel, the Western reader and give him through the drama of conflicting ideologies deeper insight into the perennial problems of freedom and fellowship.

The inclusion of some of the articles on Education, however, does not seem to be so re-assuring. The significance of these has certainly somewhat waned with the passage of time and the consequent change of circumstances. It is lucky that place has been found for at least two essays, written in English by Tagore himself and not translated from Bengali as a comment quoted on the jacket of *Towards Universal Man* mistakenly suggests, which very aptly and succinctly present his ideas on education : *A Poet's School* and *The Centre of Indian Culture*. And no apology indeed is needed regarding such essays as *Society and State*, *City and Village*, *Co-operation*, *The Changing Age* and *Crisis in Civilization*—which happen to be some of the most profound and poignant things Tagore ever wrote and embody his deepest thoughts on Man and his role in the world, on ways and means of solving the many problems that threaten not only a loss of older values and incentives but a total bankruptcy of human civilization and

culture. The only aspect which has not been represented is Tagore's religious, or one should rather say spiritual thought. This gap could easily have been filled by the inclusion, for instance, of *The Poet's Religion*. *The Religion of an Artist*, comprising lectures delivered in China and Dacca, would also have served the purpose well and more amenably to the predilections of the modern Western reader.

*Rabindranath Tagore on Art and Aesthetics* is a selection of his essays, lectures and letters on the subject. Prithwish Neogi, the editor of this volume, has contributed to the Sahitya Akademi Volume an article entitled *Drawings and Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore* which offers a very able and insightful analysis of the growth and development of this side of his personality. The volume edited by Neogi includes *The Religion of an Artist* mentioned above. Some of the letters included, though brief and couched in simple and straightforward language of daily use, give all the clues necessary for deciphering the mystery of his artistic creations. The book incorporates a number of Tagore's pictures to illustrate the different aspects of his creation. As Tagore's thoughts and observations on Art and Aesthetics can be found scattered throughout the entire body of his work — prose or poetry, and as his literary criticism and even the prologues and epilogues of some of his plays like *Phalguni* and quite a number of his songs contain notions and insights which have a bearing on his Art, the compilation of a complete and exhaustive volume, though desirable, would be a tremendous undertaking. In the meanwhile considering the growing interest both in the East and the West in Tagore's pictures, this book, carefully edited and got-up as it is, will certainly serve a useful purpose.

A full-scale life of Tagore in English has long remained one of our unfulfilled obligations to his Western readers. Krishna Kripalani deserves our gratitude for taking upon himself this onerous task and accomplishing it so well. His intimate connection with Tagore family and long association with Santi-

niketan, his knowledge of Bengali and thorough understanding of the original works of the Poet suit him eminently for the undertaking. The volume under review is said to be an abridged and early edition of a book of much ampler size expected to be published in the U. K. and the U. S. A. before long. This process of curtailment has made the smaller book appear somewhat abrupt at places. The succession of facts and events and the phases of the Poet's life as depicted, has at times produced the impression rather of kaleidoscopic change than of an integral developmental movement. But the merits of the book are obvious. The limpid and easy flow of the account which presents all manner of essential facts and information without ever appearing to be overburdened by them and the highly apposite and often revealing summaries of a great many of the more important poems, of almost all the novels and plays and even of a number of short stories are sure to make the book exceedingly helpful to non-Bengali readers.

Hiren Mukherjee's *Himself a True Poem* covers almost the same ground as Kripalani's *A Life*, only in a different way. The account of a life has mainly to follow a chronological order, and any appraisals of particular aspects of that life that it may have to offer must wait for the right moment and occasion and must come in bits in the course of a running commentary gradually working up to a completeness of statement in each case. Kripalani in this respect is modest in his aim. He does not propose to give any original estimates or initiate any strikingly new approach and treatment. His merit lies in his dependability, his scrupulous selection and presentation of just the basic facts and circumstances which should help avoid errors of judgment and put the matter in proper perspective. Mukherjee sets out the various aspects and achievements in different chapters and thus has greater scope for consistent and thorough treatment. But in addition to this he includes a chapter giving a brief sketch of Tagore's life showing its significant nuances and moments of stress and strain and new adap-



tations : and also one on Tagore's relations with the West in which he analyses the circumstances which led to the so-called eclipse of Tagore's reputations and presents, indeed, a very well-informed and balanced view of the whole thing. His comment 'Tagore was never dogmatic, but in the deepest sense he was *engage* – his sympathies never failed to connect correctly and effectively with the basic national and international issues of his time. For this great quality he had to pay...' seems to be just the long and the short of the matter.

Mukherjee's summing up of each aspect of Tagore's creative activity is balanced and apt, though in certain cases somewhat sketchy. But the chapter on Tagore's poetry and the last several chapters on Tagore as a thinker and reformer are fuller and carry more weight. In writing these the writer has, on his own admission, depended rather exclusively on a number of authors whose leftist leanings are well-known.\* For an estimate of the poetical works he has constantly harked back to Thompson and J. C. Ghosh, but fortunately this has not made him unresponsive to Yeats and Ezra Pound. What is a pleasing surprise in this very componently written book is that the writer has shown a sensitiveness to 'spiritual values' which he has not deemed necessary to conceal or camouflage in deference to the taste and preferences of the Western reader.

The Centenary Number of the *Sangit Natak Akademi Bulletin*, edited by Pulin Behari Sen and Kshitis Roy will please all who are specially interested in Tagore's contributions in the sphere of music and drama. Excerpts from Tagore's own writings carefully chosen and put in sequence together with a select number of essays and memoirs selected from the writings of persons most competent to write on this aspect of Tagore's creative work either by virtue of special knowledge or because

\* But this has in no way affected his approach and final evaluations which are always broad and liberal – though perhaps a little eclectic.

of their intimate association with it make this publication one of lasting value. Among the contributors are Indira Devi Chaudhurani, Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji, Arnold A. Bake, Pratima Tagore and P. Guha Thakurta. The photographs showing scenes from the various dramatic performances with Tagore himself appearing in many of them in different roles and the drawings and paintings chosen from the works of Jyotirindranath, Abanindranath, Nandalal Bose, Ramendranath Chakravarty and Tagore himself are, to say the least, delectable. And the editors are to be highly commended on the impress of taste and refinement they have made the publication carry.

*The Centenary Volume* brought out by the Sahitya Akademi certainly represents the most ambitious and expensive effort of the year. But in pronouncing on it one naturally feels the need for caution and restraint. Because by its very purpose and design it unavoidably invites comparison with the series of similar publications during Tagore's lifetime, particularly *The Golden Book of Tagore*. The personal testimonies and tributes of famous men all the world over, the carefully written first appraisals and authoritative accounts of the various aspects and events of the poet's life together with the high standard of get-up and production which made that publication so unique are not certainly things which one should expect to find on every occasion. Moreover, with the passage of years the general background of public expectations and requirements of further study and research against which such projects have to be assessed has considerably changed. The season for collecting tributes and testimonials and first impressions or over-all non-detailed appraisals, however glowing, revealing or pioneering they might once have been, seems now to be over. Now the need of the hour and consequently the objectives which a big national undertaking of this kind may reasonably set before itself may be stated thus :

1. To collect facts and information, personal reminiscences and authentic eye-witness accounts which would

throw more light on certain comparatively obscure or controversial aspects of Tagore's life and works.

2. To have the same kind of work done by interested and competent persons of all the countries which felt the impact of Tagore's mission and acknowledged his influence, so that a just appraisal of such impact and influence can be made.
3. To present, wherever possible, new standpoints and approaches : — the fruits of more sustained and thorough going enquiry in the various fields of research which might help correct the errors of exaggeration, wrong emphasis, insufficient data and inadequate personal equipment which vitiate much of what has been done up till now.
4. To make available for use by serious students of Tagore all over the country and abroad a carefully prepared and thoroughly checked chronicle and also a complete Bibliography.

The sponsors of the *Sahitya Akademi Volum* : have very wisely resisted the temptation of merely emulating and repeating the Golden Book type of achievement and addressed themselves exactly to the tasks mentioned above, as the names given to the five sections of the book clearly show : viz. 1. Personal Memories ; 2. Studies and Appreciations ; 3. Tagore in Other Lands ; 4. Offerings ; 5. Chronicles and Bibliography. Besides these there are two prefatory articles, one by Sri Jawaharlal Nehru and another by Sri Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

It has to be admitted that all that sober planning could envisage and determined effort could secure has been reaped and garnered in this volume. The right sources have been tapped, the right persons selected for carrying out the different assignments. The Tagore Chronicle of Eighty Years prepared by Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyaya and Kshitis Roy and the Bibliography compiled by Pulinbihari Sen and Jagadindra Bhaumik cannot but be regarded by all Tagore scholars as

valuable annexures. *Tagore in Other Lands* is indeed almost a heroic attempt to reconstruct, on the basis of materials culled from original sources, an authentic documentary of Tagore's world pilgrimage. Not that all the articles fulfil that purpose ; some indeed are rather tenuous and insufficient or more in the nature of personal utterance than of an objective historical account. But the number of articles which bring up some new material or present some new evidence is not negligible. Particularly competent and revealing among these essays in Pierre Fallon's *Tagore in the West*. Seeing that Vera Brittain's article *Tagore's Relations with England* does no more than what some of the articles in this section do, namely trace and try to account for the growth and decline of Tagore's reputation and influence in a particular country, one fails to see why it was included not here but in the Studies and Appreciations section.<sup>1</sup>

The Offerings section is supposed to offer essays not specifically devoted to the consideration of any aspect of Tagore's life and works but having a general bearing on it or providing the necessary background and perspective for such studies. From this standpoint Amiya Chakravarty's article on *The Implications of Indian Ethics for International Relations* is important and interesting, the articles by Vasudev Gokhale on Sinological Studies and by Narayana Menon on The Music of India are also useful. But Stella Kramrisch's article '*The one in the Rig Veda*', though scholarly and competent, seems rather to be out of place.

Among the contributors under Personal Memories, those by Indira Debi Chowdhurani and Rathindranath Tagore, the Poet's niece and son respectively, are authentic and valuable. The two other articles, one by Victoria Ocampo, Tagore's hostess in Buenos Aires to whom Tagore dedicated his *Purabi*

1 The contribution of Laxness, the Nobel Prize winner, could similarly have been more fittingly included in the Studies and Appreciations section rather than under Tagore in Other Lands.

and the other by L. K. Elmhirst are as attractive as they are important.

The section Studies and Appreciations includes a number of personal impressions and tributes by eminent persons like Albert Schweitzer, Pearl Buck, Richard Church, the English Poet, Arnold Keyserling, the son of the famous savant, Joseph Loewenbach, Rukmini Debi Arundale. To this list may be added Nehru's modest but very sincere tribute which will raise sympathetic echoes in many hearts. Although the great number of similar personal statements in the earlier Jayanti publications would lead one to think that any further contribution of that nature would be useless, the fact remains that some of these do help establish certain facts about Tagore's influence which are frequently denied or forgotten :

In spite of the apparent fluctuation in the extent and degree of Tagore's influence on the public mind in the West as also in the East, there has always been a band of steadfast admirers and devoted followers all over the world – and some of the world's noblest personalities and keenest and most progressive minds are among them, – who have never allowed their minds to be befogged with sceptical questionings and confusing thoughts regarding the ultimate value and place of Tagore's contribution.

Some of the earlier verdicts by eminent men, which appeared to doubting minds to be more effusive than critical, still stand and take the character, not of a passing enthusiasm and excitement, but of a final and lasting utterance of a certain order of mind on Tagore's achievements. Uncritical effusiveness is always a thing of small value and should be discouraged. But the high enthusiasm which may very well accompany the highest and acutest critical appreciation in cases where it is legitimate seems to be held in scorn and ruled out by some modern critics who believe that a cynical, cavilling attitude is more becoming and 'enlightened' on the part of a critic than an approach of

frank emotional apprehension. It is now time to see that a considerable amount of spontaneous utterance that has so long been condemned as exaggeration by critics in the West and even in India was not necessarily so, that the use of superlatives in regard to a creative artist of Tagore's stature may be, barring certain cases where the critics are ill-equipped and parochial, quite in keeping with the rigorous standard of critical objectivity.

Among the more serious and sustained studies which may be said to have broken new ground or paved the way to fuller research the most outstanding are Humayun Kabir's *Social and Political Ideas of Tagore*, which is really a summing up of and commentary on *Towards Universal Man*, Nihar Ranjan Ray's *Rabindranath Tagore and the Indian Tradition*, Abu Sayeed Ayub's *The Aesthetic Philosophy of Tagore*, Prithwish Neogy's *Drawings and Paintings of Tagore*, S. C. Sarkar's *Tagore as Poet-Educator* ; and among the articles bearing on Tagore's literary works Taraknath Sen's *Western Influence on the Poetry of Tagore*, Nirmal Kumar Siddhanta's *Rabindranath's Short Stories* and Buddhadeva Bose's *Rabindranath Tagore and Bengali Prose*. In this series when one misses is a competent article surveying the entire poetical output and fixing the requirements of a balanced and systematic appraisal.

Mention should also be made of other interesting contributions like Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Tagore as a Novelist*, which one wishes to have been fuller, Lila Majumdar's *Tagore as a Writer for Children* and Annada Sankar Ray's *Rabindranath, An Artist in Life*.

The illustrations which include paintings and sketches by Jyotirindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and others, as also the general get-up of the book make it all the more attractive. There cannot be any doubt that all public institution—academic and non-academic and all scholars and men of culture will buy and treasure it as a valuable possession.

*Towards Universal Man* : published simultaneously in India, the United Kingdom and The United States of America by Asia Publishing House on behalf of the Tagore Commemorative Volume Society, New Delhi in collaboration with the Ford Foundation, New York, Chief Translator and Editor : Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya. Preface and Introduction by Humayun Kabir. Pp. 387.

*Tagore on Art and Aesthetics* : published for International Cultural Centre. New Delhi, by Orient Longmans ; edited by PRITHWISH NEOGY. Pp. 113.

*Tagore : A Life* by KRISHNA KRIPALANI. Limited Indian edition published by Malancha, New Delhi. Pp. 200.

*Himself a True Poem* by HIREN MUKHERJEE Published by People's Publishing House, New Delhi. Pp. 152.

*Sangeet Natak Akademi Bulletin* : Rabindranath Tagore Centenary Number. Edited by PULINBIHARI SEN and KSHITIS ROY. Foreword by KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY. Pp. 109.

## SRI AUROBINDO'S WRITINGS

SRI AUROBINDO'S WRITINGS, literary and non-literary, planned and incidental, prose and poetry—all put together, constitute indeed a contribution to knowledge and culture seldom paralleled in history in vastness of scope or in sheer amount, in variety of modes or forms attempted.

But his fecundity, the ceaseless flow of his pen during certain periods, the calm, deliberate planning behind all his works and the thoroughness and completeness which characterise his achievements—all this would usually mark off a strong contestant for high literary renown. But Sri Aurobindo's supreme unconcern for reputation or publicity, his ability to wait and to depend on time to do its work reveal the Seer, the Visionary, the high interpreter of truth revealed, who wrote because he had to, who had nothing to gain, no claim to make for himself, but who could just leave it to the world to do what it will with this stupendous, challenging, often tough, almost forbidding mass of wisdom and invention.

Evidence is fast accumulating to show that the world, in spite of contrary currents in its present mental climate, is more and more getting into the mood of grateful acceptance towards this hitherto unrecognised treasure. This has been wholly due to the devoted and systematic efforts of the Pondicherry Ashram to bring out the Master's writings, duly classified, arranged and edited in books which for their excellent printing and distinctive get-up are bound to please even the most fastidious among book-lovers. We have gratefully received many and hope to receive more of these publications from the Ashram with equal gratitude and pleasure.

The chief preoccupation in Sri Aurobindo's prose writings is of course his system of yoga and its manifold exposition



either in planned essays or in letters, marginal notes, conversations just as the occasion demanded. Closely allied to this central interest are his studies or visions relating to the destinies of India, of the world and of the human civilisation which seems today to be inextricably entangled in a mesh of its own making. In whichever field of enquiry his mind may work, history of civilisations, appreciation of poetry and art or analysis of philosophical systems, Sri Aurobindo looks at his subject from all conceivable angles, carefully sets out the main points on each side, gives each approach its due value and in what might have been, and with most other writers always is, a battlefield of warring systems and mental dispositions, constructs a harmonious all-embracing pattern. His poise is unshakeable, the thoroughness and justness of his appraisal always disarming. Such an endeavour as his might very well land even a great writer in a mess of verbal contradictions, loose dangling ends of the yarn of thought, obstinate obscurities, insufferably tortuous and laborious advancement of the theme ; or if nothing else, in depressing over-weighted terminology and inescapable feeling of pressure, awkwardness and heaviness. But Sri Aurobindo's prose in spite of the heavy responsibilities thrown on its shoulders retains clarity of purpose and an ease of movement all through. It does not only perform its work of lucid, precise exposition well, it reveals an elasticity of self-adjustment, a flexibility of mood and manner in keeping with the task in hand, a subtle sensitive awareness of worlds of values behind and around the bare commissioned march of ideas, an occasional happy mood of expansion and relaxation and personal utterance, of humour and tenderness and endlessly gentle and hence wholly irresistible satire which very decisively raise it to the level of art. It not only satisfies the intellect and its demand for justice, it pleases the heart and the imagination and even the inner person in the reader whose demand is not merely to be convinced but to be converted. A high pre-eminence among the world's great masters

of prose seems to be assured to Sri Aurobindo, the author of the *Life Divine*, *The Yoga Treatises*, *The Human Cycle*, the critical appreciation of Kalidasa, *The Future Poetry* and of numerous letters and notes which are now being compiled in series of volumes.

Much can and should be written on Sri Aurobindo's role in the present-day world as a philosophical thinker, or rather a *synthesiser* of systems, a bold path-finder in the wilderness of belligerent creeds and inconsequential though *high-sounding* intellectual adventures ; also as a literary and art critic. The philosophical crusade which he carries on with unabated vigour and masterfulness in every field of thought, detecting and disarming even the smallest opposition, the flimsiest doubt, the weakest denial always ends in the triumphant re-assertion of the one triumphant solution : This world is real ; man has the divine spark cushioned and hidden away in the inner recesses of his heart ; man must rise above and beyond humanity and the Divine must come down and transform man and this world and fulfil creation. The immediate target of aspiration therefore is the plane of the Supermind which is a preserver and promoter of the myriad variations of forms and modes and yet a never-failing unifier, a weaver of harmonies.

According to Sri Aurobindo poetry and the arts must also rise to heights not yet scaled, dive to depths yet unplumbed, expand and grow in power so as to create a new world of aesthetic enjoyment. Anticipations and even significant capturing of intermediate fields pointing the way to the final conquest Sri Aurobindo discovers among poets like Whitman, A. E. and mostly in Tagore. Considering that *The Future Poetry* was composed in years closely following the publication of the English Gitanjali, and that at that time Sri Aurobindo could not possibly take into account the rich and amazingly varied harvest of Tagore's genius which come later, Sri Aurobindo's tribute to him may very well be looked upon not only as adequate penetrating but as revealing some of the essential prin-

ciples and characteristics of Tagore's poetical achievement which critics of Tagore literature will be ill-advised to ignore.

Literature was Sri Aurobindo's first passion, and it remained with him till the end of his long life inspite of his two other all too engrossing preoccupations, politics and Yoga. His first book of poems was published in England while he was just a young student and his efforts to complete and round off the stupendous undertaking, the epic poem *Savitri* continued almost till the last day of his life – which indeed would remind one of Tagore's unexampled span of ceaseless literary activity. In Sri Aurobindo's case, however, there were long gaps in his literary career, periods of silence showing the temporary sacrifice or putting aside of the creative urge for what seemed to him to be more imperative. But the interest never flagged.

Sri Aurobindo has written one or two short stories which draw their distinctive turn of thought from his Yogic insight into the mystery of life and death. But his genius finds its most spontaneous expression in poetry and drama. His verse translations of poems and dramas of Kalidasa, for example, the *Kumar Sambhavam* and the *Vikramorvashie*, may serve to the western reader as the best possible introduction to the poetic greatness of Kalidasa. His own poetry includes love lyrics, elegiac and contemplative verses, several dramatic narratives like *Baji Prabhou*, *Love and Death*, *Urvashie*, the fragment *Chitra*, which deserve and some day are sure to find a pre-eminent position in their own genre not only in the English but also in world literature. We are here concerned to consider chiefly three of his books which we have received : *The Last Poems* and *Savitri* which represent the later poetical output of the Master and *Perseus the Deliverer*, the one complete original drama in five acts written by him in the first years of this century.

The plot of the drama is a very free and undaunted adaptation of the ancient legend of the liberation of Andromache by Perseus, the favoured hero of the goddess Athene, the renowned vanquisher of the Gorgon Medusa. The theme, it can easily

be seen, puts every opportunity in the hands of the writer to bring out and spotlight his own favourite message : the descent of the divine into this woe-begone world and its redemption through the flowering of the principle of love in the answering heart of humanity. One would naturally look for a strong influence of the Greek dramatic tradition in one who won high distinction as a profound classical scholar. But except for the plot, the writer seems to owe very little else to the Greeks. There is neither the rigid structure, nor the processional, troop-march like movement of thought and action. Nor again is there the sense of an over-hanging, down-pressing destiny and a world of contending human passions. Only perhaps in the delineation of the character of the diabolic priest, is there a harking back to Greek achievements like *Clytemnestra*.

Shakespeare, the latterday master who lived in a more aesthetically refined age, and who may be looked upon as the chief literary model followed by our author, would have shrunk from the task of presenting such an unmitigated figure of stark badness, or putting into tearing verse the rhapsody of untrammelled evil passion as we find in Sri Aurobindo's Polydaon. Shakespeare humanised even an Iago, poetised the witches in *Macbeth* and made them tolerable ; kept Caliban subdued under a higher power and prevented him from growing into an obnoxious nuisance. Sri Aurobindo's Polydaon is, on the other hand, a relentless portrayal, made intelligible and acceptable in the domain of art not by the flickering light of an uncertain destiny which Greek art sheds over such figures, but by a light of higher wisdom, an over-all view of things which appreciates the roles of goodness and badness in the drama of evolving values.

In its basic poetic temper, in the flow and nuances of its blank-verse, in its ordering of the conversations among friends or among the crowds, in its sudden expansions of mood and outbursts of ample generous expression, Perseus certainly recalls Shakespeare. Some of the characters also may be said to

have been patterned on Shakespearean models. And the entire drama with its romantic theme, its spirit of high adventure and expanding, triumphing genial emotions bears a very strong resemblance to *The Tempest*. Perseus and Andromache would easily remind one of Ferdinand and Miranda. But all this is merely to indicate the tradition that our author utilises, the ground he builds on. Shakespeare's art and techniques have been emulated by quite a number of later English writers.

It may be claimed that Sri Aurobindo has been able to recapture Shakespeare's graces and rehabilitate his felicities in a new setting to a greater degree than any of the English writers has been able to do. But the worth of the drama certainly does not depend only on this. The distinctive Aurobindean contribution unmistakeably overtops and suffuses everything else. It consists in an exalted god-like vision which sees the world from end to end at a glance and sees it clearly, which seizes at once the truth and inner essence of a character, be it Pallas Athene, or Poseidon, Perseus, Andromache or even the butcher Praxilla. It also consists in the power of firmly recapturing the great and sublime emotions of the heart and making them last through all the vicissitudes of long eventful scenes. In Tagore's dramas one finds all that is sensitive, refined, ethereal, vast. In Sri Aurobindo one finds all that is luminous, vigorous, calm and strong, everything that has in it a suggestion of divine poise and potency, grace and gladness. The vigorous, yet rhythmic movement of the action, the variety of characters luminously drawn, the gripping interest of all the episodes presented, the powerful, even-handed treatment of both good and evil and through it all a sense of high heaven-kissing adventure and fulfilment make *Perseus the Deliverer* a lasting contribution to world literature. This is not the place to compare it with the famous dramas and epics which deal with a similar cosmic theme, for example, the Prometheus plays by Aeschylus and Shelley, *Faust*, *Tempest*, *Paradise Lost*, *Hyperion*, Tagore's *Rakta-Karavi* etc. But it will certainly

take its rank among them and occupy, one may venture to observe, quite a high place.

Another full-fledged drama in five acts we have just received for review is *Vasavadutta*, which was finally put into its present shape by the author sometime in 1916. The theme is an adaptation of the Udayana fable in *Kathasaritsagara*. Udayana is an enigmatic character like Antony in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. His contradictory moods and actions are very convincingly presented and the beauty and brilliance of the dæmon that guides him allowed to shine forth through the confusions of ordinary life and its intrigues. The background of the drama is ruthless opposition of power, intrigue and insurrection. But extraordinarily fortunate traits in the characters of the chief persons in the drama, the breaking in at moments of tension and suspense of a happier mental climate, raise the drama to a nobler level of human experience than Shakespeare or any other western dramatist ever presented. But Shakespeare's unparalleled instinct for these happy turns of genius, favourable formations of traits and movements of impulse, affords examples which anticipate the unwise yet attractive friendship among the rival princes, the combination of practical sagacity and seer-like wisdom in the minister Yougundharayan ( Prospero ), the pride and lust for power and capricious majesty of the King of Avunthie. The love scenes also possibly may recall the charm and poignancy of some of Shakespeare's famous love scenes. But these are all on the surface. The moment the reader enters into the inner atmosphere of the drama and meets the inner persons of the characters presented, he is apt to feel himself to be irresistibly raised to a higher plane where live and move spirits purer and nobler than we know here on earth. *Vasavadutta* is not an escape to this plane, but a triumph of realisation of its possibilities in this world. The recognition of Sri Aurobindo as one of the greatest dramatists now is only a matter of time.

The time to talk about *Savitri* is perhaps not yet. This,

one can see, is going to remain an enigma or challenge to readers of poetry for many years to come. Western poetry has in recent years become more and more difficult and exclusive and often sought to engage attention by offering verbal riddles to be deciphered. Occasionally lone poets have insisted on talking about entirely private experiences in a very non-communicative way. The poet of *Savitri* is not at all reticent, nor is he niggardly in his expression. He seems, on the contrary, to believe in complete exhaustive statement which he makes in a lucid, precise language wholly free from obscurities or irregularities of construction. He does not claim his experiences to be just his own private affair. On the contrary, he looks upon himself as a poet of things universal and eternal which, sooner or later, must open and be accessible to all men. This raises the interesting issue ; is poetical communication at all possible between different levels and planes of experience ? The answer, of course, lies in Sri Aurobindo's own theory of involution and evolution of powers and potentialities. Experiences yet to be, are already germinally, potentially present in man. If this be so, there is no reason why Sri Aurobindo's poetry should not knock at the closed gates and awaken the sleeping princess to light of day and love. There are indeed passages in the *Savitri*, inspite of its theme of yogic adventure into different worlds and planes of existence which may not appeal to many, and yet have a power of exaltation, a sense of denouement and wide unwonted release, or a compelling grandeur of vision not found in any previous poet. Poetry need not always be recollected in tranquillity, but poetry, at least great poetry, must always be in its movement and effect an achievement of poise and tranquillity. There is a power in peace which is to be found in nothing else. *Savitri* breathes and moves through that power, its *rasa* is that *santa rasa* which Kalidasa understood. The ordinary reader would discover his poetic power more readily in the descriptions of man's world as it is today, the cycle of the seasons and such

other things of common experience. Sri Aurobindo's treatment of Nature and the seasons as compared with Tagore's may be broadly characterised by the same observations as we made earlier in this article regarding Tagore and Sri Aurobindo's dramatic genius. There is also a striking resemblance between the sublime utterances of the Raja in Tagore's *Arup Ratan* and God's parlance with Savitri. But this analogy of course, is only valid up to a point. Sri Aurobindo's God speaks as nothing at all spoke before in poetry, dramatic or epic. People who are capable of being thrilled by dialogues between Raja and Sudarsana, or Raja and Nandini ( *Rakta-Karavi* ) should have no difficulty in having a sense of Sri Aurobindo's poetic stature from the dialogues between Yama and Savitri and God and Savitri.

Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius finds its most characteristic expression in his dramatic and narrative poetry, but his lyrical gift also is of a high order, though less frequently used. Here his art mainly acts through melodic and tonic arrangement of the elements of sound and sense, the realisation of the uniquely expressive in *dhvani* which lays bare the heart and mood and elevation of the particular poem. This indeed is a manner which came to be completely overshadowed in the closing decade of the 19th century by the growing demand for subtlety of thought and sentiment and quickly changing or artfully concentrated imagery, so much so, that even very sensitive and generous minds these days have lost the power of appreciating the type of poetic achievement which could only be communicated through something like the organ voice of Milton, the musical cadences of a Virgil, the mellifluous yet grand sound-movements of Kalidasa. Sri Aurobindo also has got the power of vividly presenting images and even whole panoramas in a few decisive, luminous phrases. But his poetic inspiration almost wholly depends for its transmission on harmonic and rhythmic arrangements of sound-values, from which our Vedic and Upanishadic verses derive their power of appeal.



## SRI AUROBINDO AS A DRAMATIST

THE EPIC and the dramatic are two closely allied literary genres. And yet very seldom has a single poet attained similar or even comparable distinction in both the fields. Goethe wanted to combine the advantages of both the forms, the wide compass and free enterprise of the epic with the concentration and disciplined movement of the drama in a single work, the *Faust*. Great as was his poetic achievement in this newly created form, it does not entitle him to any high credit as a master of both the forms. Milton's *Paradise Lost* has certainly its own claim to greatness in spite of its imperfections and his *Samson Agonistes* also is no mean achievement. Among our own poets we have Kalidasa who could fashion poems like *Kumāra Sambhavam* and *Raghu Vanśam* on the one hand and turn out on the other magnificent dramas like *Vikramorvasīyam* and *Abhijnāna Śakuntalam*. Against the above examples we may set Sri Aurobindo's *Bāji Prabhou*, *Urvasīe*, *Love and Death*, *Ilion* (recently published) and *Sāvitrī* as his achievement in the epic field and *Perseus* and *Vāsavaduttā* (not counting short pieces like the *Birth of Sin* or pieces representing poetical thinking cast into the dramatic mould), in the dramatic. It can at once be seen that both in the scope and the quality of achievement Sri Aurobindo stands foremost among his poetical compeers.

Sri Aurobindo's profound scholarship in European literature, particularly in the classical, may provide a clue to the formation of his poetic personality. Looking closely, one may indeed find in him 'influences' of all the really great European poets from Homer down to Shakespeare. But any measure of acquaintance with our poet will at once convince anybody that these influences were nothing more than external occasions and

stimuli which served to bring out his own poetic powers. And amazingly varied and rich are these gifts. Equally amazing is the masterfulness, the ability to control and put everything in its place and weave everything into a planned design which is the whole which characterises his artistic personality. The tone and temper of the epic poet, his stern insistence on aspects of things and objectives, his prophetic fury, his endless adventure into new domains of thought and vision do not interfere with or hamper the task of the dramatic poet. Indeed, such is Sri Aurobindo's control over his own poetic impulses and abilities, that Sri Aurobindo the dramatist and Sri Aurobindo the epic poet seem to be two entirely different personalities, each great in his own proper field.

Both the dramas show a breadth of imaginative vision, a nobleness of poetic endeavour which would recall Aeschylus rather than Sophocles ; a genial, one would be tempted to say 'romantic' atmosphere and a richly varied assemblage of character, incident and sentiment which would as surely recall Shakespeare rather than Milton, although Sri Aurobindo also has, like Milton, a high mission to fulfil, to do something like 'justifying the ways of God to man' in his own way.

It is not easy to classify these two dramas. The western concepts of tragedy and comedy do not seem to apply in their case, as they combine the values of both, the high seriousness of purpose and sentiment which marks the tragedy with a sense of adventure and romance which is proper to comedy. In this, both the dramas resemble *The Tempest* more than any other drama.

The manner in which Sri Aurobindo solves the problems of dramatic construction and devises a mould suited to his purpose shows that, great though was his indebtedness to the western dramatic tradition, he could not accept it totally. This tradition is based on a philosophy of life which gives a very important place to Evil in the scheme of things. Having found no generally acceptable solution for the problems that

the very existence of Evil raises, western dramatists have as a rule accepted 'conflict' as the indispensable basis of high drama. People to whom life invariably appears either as an insoluble tangle of fate and circumstance or as an irreconcilable conflict of characters, interests or impulses, would very naturally look upon tragedy as the highest and the most poignant literary vehicle. But surely it would be unreasonable to expect dramatists of all places and times to conform to the same set of rules, subscribe to the same unalterable view of life and fashion their dramas in accordance with the same stereotyped pattern. Awareness of Life and its values and implications is bound to change with time. One should, unless one is irrevocably committed to a philosophy of disillusionment and despair like the western people, expect a broadening, a deepening and heightening and what Sri Aurobindo would call a 'greatening' of this life-awareness with the increasing of experience and knowledge available to man with the progress of years. This is exactly the reason why Shakespeare could write great dramas only by refashioning the instrument and blending the elements of tragedy and comedy, the values proper to the different strata of human existence to suit his won taste and purpose. Indeed, too much conscious or unconscious subservience to the rigid Aristotelian laws of drama, and mainly to the theory of conflict would explain many of the difficulties with which the modern dramatist is confronted, the technical 'impasse' he finds himself in. So long as the western mind is unprepared to step beyond the arbitrary limits set by a humanistic tradition which has had its day and is now little more than effete and useless, the Sophoclesian type of drama will put in a diffident and bashful or at least an unwelcome appearance again and again only to prove once again that its days are over. T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* is one recent instance of this literary phenomenon.

It is generally believed both in this country and in the West that the oriental drama is weak and immature simply

because of its unwillingness to recognise Evil and give it its due place, to see life steadily and whole ; its eagerness to escape into realms of experience irresponsibly cut adrift from the world of reality. It is obvious that this charge is not wholly unfounded and does apply in the case of most of the ordinary Indian dramatists, ancient and modern, and points at least to one reason among many of their poor achievement. Sri Aurobindo, however, cannot be accused of this incapacity. His study of the supreme Architect of Evil and his consort in *The Birth of Sin*, of characters and types such as Hitler, the Children of Wotan, the Rakshasas in various dramatic poems, and finally his unparalleled frontal and total view of Evil in the character of Polydaon, the sinister, passion-drunk, ego-infatuated diabolic priest in *Perseus the Deliverer* would at once show beyond doubt the greatness of his approach is distinctive. He does not only unmask what is evil in man's life and destiny and character, he tries to find out all about its position in relation to the totality of the created world. Unlike Sophocles, he is not interested in merely showing how the engines of Fate overtake unsuspecting man. Nor is he prepared to accept the position taken by Shakespeare, that of limiting the gaze only to life in this world and maintaining a discreet attitude of neutrality to things beyond, the sleep which 'rounds' our terrestrial existence. Like Milton, Sri Aurobindo must unravel the whole mystery. But the figure of Good, the hierarchy of God and his angels which Milton placed against the image of Evil drawn powerfully and convincingly are more a matter of faith than of realisation, more a possibility in a hypothetical heaven than a reality or even a probability here on earth. Sri Aurobindo is equally convincing in depicting the forces and phenomena of the Evil and of the Good. He has an amazing capacity of mind and range of thought and vision, a God-like vision of all that spreads out and fills the infinite spaces of the universe, of Good and Evil and their endless broods and the role assigned to each of these

in the gradually unfolding drama of life. So his dramatic poise and objectivity are not the result of a deliberate shutting out of facts and feelings pointing to realms beyond, but of a calm and steady contemplation of the universe, which characterises the highest spiritual and creative efforts in India.

It is therefore not surprising to find Sri Aurobindo, though his literary upbringing was wholly European, looking for his dramatic model in Kalidasa and getting it there. His translation of Kalidasa's 'Vikramorvashie' into English indicates his mental leaning and final choice. Here is a close resemblance to the workings of another great mind, that of Tagore, in the same field of literary creation. His famous comparison of Kalidasa's 'Shakuntala' and Shakespeare's 'Tempest' reveals how his dramatic conscience developed. Like Kalidasa, Tagore also has dismissed all crude and external forms of evil from his dramas as comparatively unimportant. Kalidasa's Vikram and Dushyanta are both more than competent to quell the incursions of the Asura, the Titan, or the nameless brood of anarchy and disaster which even Indra fears. These heroes have rather to fight with a certain lack in man's, in their own, nature :—a contrariety of disposition, an inability to respond to a higher call when it comes. Kalidasa's solution is an elevation of the whole scene to a higher plane where the drag and pull of dull earth is transcended, where all that is needed to unbar the gates of beauty and love is a purging and chastening of character, a sublimation of impulses and sentiments. Tagore depended on this principle of sublimation for many years. In his early dramas like *Visarjan* and *Raja O Rani*, which betray Shakespeare's influence in their structure and movement and conception of character as strongly as does Sri Aurobindo's *Perseus the Deliverer*, the decisive dramatic force yet works through Aparna and Sumitra respectively, in whom it is not difficult to discover the yearning soul of love, the sublimated, fire-cleansed figure of devotion one finds in Kalidasa's poetic world, for example in his Uma and Shakuntala.

But neither Tagore nor Sri Aurobindo could rest content with Kalidasa's solution. Each of them had to go further ahead and discover the vehicle which would best serve to express his unique creative impulse. But even here the two minds are seen to have proceeded on similar lines. Elevation and sublimation lie open to the charge of escapism. Something more tangible and permanent is necessary. Transformation here on the familiar plane of consciousness rather than a temporary and precariously poised elevation to a higher plane should be the objective. Tagore realises this possibility in a changed awareness of Life in relation to Universal Nature which transforms the scene completely and convincingly as in his *Falguni*. Death and decay fly like withered leaves before a storm before this new consciousness which inspires, and almost inebriates, the troupe of young men in that drama. But nothing short of the transformation of individual human nature can avail against evils which are man-made. A first indication and utilisation of this solution may be found in *Malini* (1896), in which Malini's character works as a light and a power, though the drama ends in tragedy. Nandini in *Rakta-Karabi* is Tagore's final effort and achievement in this direction. Her nature is purified, universalised, though Tagore takes pains to keep her 'human'. She is the human counterpart of the principles of beauty and vitality and rejuvenescence which exist in universal Nature. But in spite of Nandini's partial triumph and the note of high courage and resolute action with which the drama ends, the fact remains that Ranjan, Nandini's beloved, could enter the stage only through death. Nandini herself is, to a very great extent if not wholly, a new possibility realised. But her love remains ill-fated, tragic.

Now, if we look at Sri Aurobindo's dramas we find a process of sublimation at work in *Perseus the Deliverer*. It is most apparent in Andromeda, who resembles Tagore's Malini in her susceptibility to something like Buddhist compassion. But this is only one of the elements which build up the atmosphere.

If Andromeda represents the gradually changing human consciousness, there is Perseus who represents the semi-divinised man and throws across the scenes fraught with danger and horror a light and gladness of assured superiority and effectiveness. And finally, there is Athene who appears twice and speaks in accents which are incontestably divine.

Because of the throwing together of an excessive measure of what is violently and craftily evil with soul states representing different stages of transformation, from refined human nature to divine nature, *Perseus the Deliverer* remains on the level of a high imaginative adventure and does not descend and find its permanent poise on the material plane. In this respect, *Vāsavaduttā* may be said to be maturer and more fruitful. There the characters are decisively of this world, they can live and move here naturally without demanding any specially controlled environment and atmosphere congenial to their mode of being, and yet display traits in their nature which can unmistakably be recognised as divine or as influences of a super-nature — powers and insights and impulses which have descended from it but have happily found poise and permanent lodgment in the nature of these privileged persons. If Tagore's high dramatic achievement has been to transform the world of relationship between man and universal Nature, Sri Aurobindo has achieved transformed Man — not a thing of fable and myth, not a being that can breathe only in an exclusive atmosphere of high poetic aspiration as in Shelley and Tagore, but one who can come down and live among ordinary men and things and spread his inner gladness and strength around like the light and joy of a new dawn.

Not only in the delineation of a number and variety of characters, but in every other aspect necessary for the perfection of dramatic construction — in the ordering and management of event, the maintenance of an eager expectation and suspense, in the fluency and flexibility of language and verse to suit different emotional occasions, in the laying of the scenes

and opportune bursts of high poetic vision and utterance – the two dramas claim a position of pre-eminence very seldom reached in the past. Shakespeare was hard put to it to keep up the interest in *The Tempest* by means of a sort of low ribaldry and intrigue which only his genius could raise to the level of high drama. The impulse of song above everything else and the dynamic force of one or two live characters supply the motive power and keep the plot going in Tagore's best dramas, and carry forward the weight of characters not wholly alive and motives and interests which are often merely mythical of matters of structural convenience. Aeschylus's ambit of emotional variation was strictly limited. But Sri Aurobindo has excelled in everything with masterful ease. His blank verse, which in the earlier of the two dramas, frankly owns Shakespearean influence, yet is a living and independent instrument in his hands, rising at his behest to meet the high and varied demands of his poetic mind. His plot in *Perseus the Deliverer*, in adapting which he took more liberty than Shakespeare ever did in choosing and adapting his, would, with its magic storm and flying prince and Medusa's head and sea-monster, gladden the heart of a pre-Shakespearean Elizabethan dramatist. And yet, in the place of an impossible melodrama we have a tone and temper not less noble than in Shakespeare's *Tempest*; in the place of a fury of declamations and excited outbursts of sentiment, we find an utterance, richly modulated to suit various occasions, and always striking the noblest, the highest, the most poignant chords.

It is sheer genius which has enabled Sri Aurobindo to maintain the interest and dramatic suspense throughout this drama in the face of the fact that he himself clothed the hero with a divine potency and power and made his victory a foregone conclusion.

*Vāsavaduttā* has a legendary flavouring, but that is only used to enrich the imaginative atmosphere. The entire story, with all its characters drawn with masterly discrimination and



insight, is placed in a setting of reality, an order of reality to which one need not grudge to grant historicity. • Everything about the drama – all its elements and parts combine to invest it with a greatness and nobleness of life and emotions. The facts of evil also are subtler, of a higher order, proper to a more developed and civilized race of men. This is also what one finds in Tagore's *Tapati* and *Rakta-Karabi*, where evil comes in as a phenomenon not without its own *raison d'être* and dignity. King Chunda Mahasegu in *Vāsavaduttā* may indeed be compared not with Coriolanus who is a less evolved specimen of humanity, but with Raja Vikram of *Tapati*. Yougandharayan may be compared with Prospero, but his wisdom may also be fittingly compared with that of Tagore's favourite and repeated representation of characters like Thakurda, Dada Thakur, Poet and Baul. But how can one find parallels to the prince Udayan and Vasavadutta? Shakespeare with the magic power of his own genius drew the figure of a capricious genius like Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* or a complex and deep personality like Hamlet. But who would ever think of including among the *dramatis personae* a personality like that of young Tagore or Sri Aurobindo himself? Yet, the charming and enigmatic and divinely prevailing personality of Udayan can be compared with nothing less refined and exalted and inspired. And Vasavadutta seems to be an early and interesting sketch of a personality that will later grow to be something like a Savitri in Sri Aurobindo's epic of the same title. Yet, how gripping and enchanting is the story of their love. The one perfect drama of love that Tagore achieved was *Chitrangada*, but even there love with all its beauty and charm could exist only under the supernatural protection of the god of love, and it needed for its full growth and stability a compact with the ordinary business and obligations of everyday life. But Udayan and Vasavadutta have a sort of integrality and totality about their personalities which seem to give them an easy superiority.

among their fellows and an unfailing control over the situations in which they are placed. And yet they are privileged to retain and enjoy their inner worlds of subtle thought and intuition, of surging waves of emotion and god-like passion. The discomfiture of the forces of Evil, viz., the jealousy and pride of the King Mahasegu, is brought about partly as a result of the magic influence of the personalities of the two lovers on those around. and partly of intuitive, opportune moves taken by them at the right moment and partly due to a happy chance.

In recounting only a few of the tense moments and interesting situations in the drama, mention has to be made of the following : the queen-mother Ungarica's secret tips to her daughter in veiled and poignant language regarding the mysteries of love ; the peculiar manner in which Udayan is taken captive by the noble and stern Gopalaca ; the prince Vicurna's sudden intolerance of his father's shrewd and dishonourable plans ; Munjoolica's very timely coming out as a sympathetic, dependable, exceptionally intelligent and resourceful accomplice of the absconders ; the brilliant plea in the name of a great nation's multitude with which Udayan prevails upon the uneasy Vasavadutta to dismiss the unreasonable duty imposed on her by her father.

But what was the dark secret in the queen mother's past ? And how was Munjoolica requited for her services ? Sri Aurobindo forgets to mention these.

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